

A VILLAGE · HAMPDEN

BY ALGERNON GISSING



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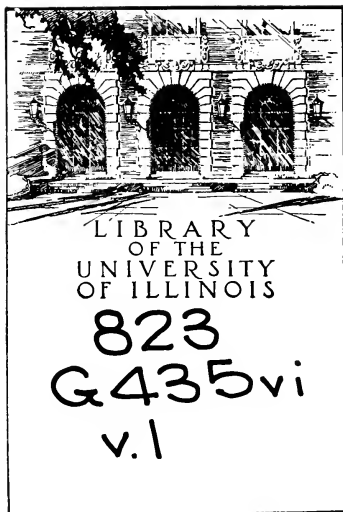
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A VILLAGE HAMPDEN

BY

ALGERNON GISSING

AUTHOR OF 'BOTH OF THIS PARISH,' ETC.

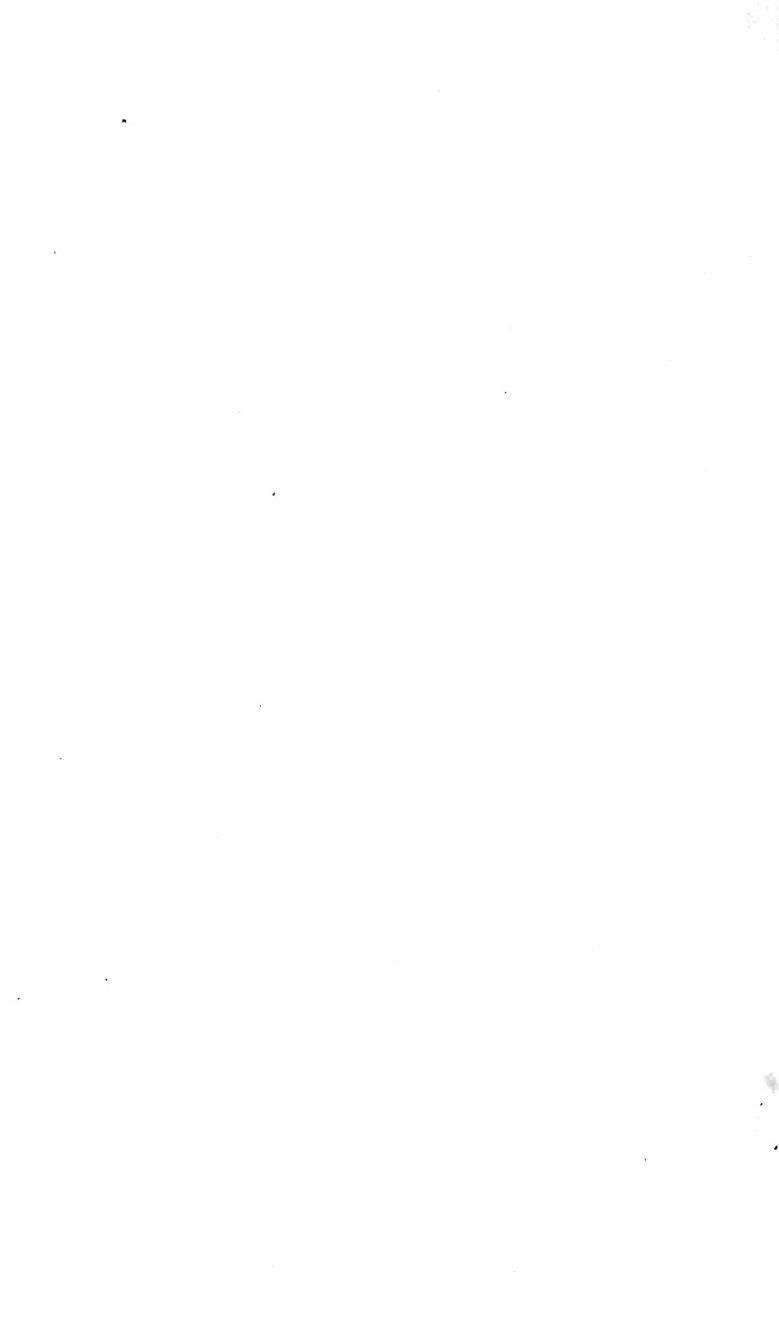
IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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OF

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A VILLAGE HAMPDEN.

CHAPTER I.

THE TENANT OF SEDGECOMB.

It was a fine frosty morning of early October, and Giles Radway was sitting at the hill-top beneath a dark cloud of pine trees, breaking his last heap of stones. He had crept slowly on from pile to pile throughout the summer, reducing each carelessly thrown heap of rugged blocks to a symmetrical mound of small and fairly equal fragments ; and he now looked forward to spending the next six months of winter in spreading them, with the same deliberation, upon the roads.

Giles was the byway roadman of the rural parish of Shipcombe, situated in a remote part of the county of Gloucester. He had laid his piece of sacking upon the small portion of the heap already broken, and was comfortably seated upon it. With his hammer he dragged forward the large blocks, as required, and split them and then re-split with a regular ringing stroke. A silver veil of frost still lay upon his shaded side of the road, covering the stones and the crisp dead leaves amongst them, as well as the broad margin of matted grass and herbage which stretched outwards from the hedge. Upon both sides of the way the hedgerows were tall and untrimmed: the one at Giles' back, screening the red, scaled trunks of the already mentioned pines, consisted for the most part of maple bushes, and from time to time one of the bright yellow leaves, which still lingered amongst the branches, would be wafted to his feet by some gentle

breath of air which whispered softly as it threaded the dark clump overhead.

After working for a few minutes, the old man would look leisurely around him, and upon such occasions he would have displayed to any observer a fresh-coloured, sharp-featured face of much intelligence and good humour. He would examine a fossil which his hammer had laid open in the stone, or a leaf, or a flower still lingering at his side ; he would smile at the bold robin which perched upon a stone before him and regaled him with its shrill, defiant song ; or laugh with the woodpecker's ringing peal, which came to him from the hillside elm trees below. Lastly, he would look up to the sky—that sparkling autumn morning sky—and there his eye would linger longest. This plain old man seemed to find in it an inexhaustible picture. First he looked towards the sun, whose orb was just now veiled behind a dapple screen ; sunk, as it seemed, beneath

a cluster of smooth grey boulders left by the ebbing tide. As his eye stole gradually upwards, the stones grew smaller and smaller, and lost all tint of grey, until they ended towards the zenith in an expanse of shingly beach—of dazzling minute pebbles, or perchance of silver spray; for Giles could not very accurately determine, as the strong light which suffused that ocean made his old eyes blink. He had quickly to withdraw them, and trace the narrow bar in the south which stretched from east to west. This led to other realms.

Whilst surveying the western horizon, absorbed in such thoughts as the scene prompted in his unsophisticated mind, Giles was aroused from his reverie by the sound of a human voice. He withdrew his eyes at once from their distant gaze, and looked consciously about him. Nobody was in sight, but that was easily explained, inasmuch as the road took a

rectangular turn only a few yards off. Moreover, the old man's face showed no appearance of surprise, but, on the contrary, immediately assumed a half-smiling, genial aspect as if about to greet a friend. The voice continued audible, and was evidently engaged in song. It was a strong tenor voice, with an obvious singing capacity, and it was at this moment vigorously adapting to its own key the strains of a Scottish song, 'Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon.'

Giles had not to wait long, for within a minute or two the expected figure turned that corner in the road, and came onwards singing. He was but half way through the last verse when he reached the place where Radway sat, so that he stood before the smiling roadman deliberately to complete his song. The singer was a young man of robust frame and healthy countenance, offering anything but a sentimental appearance; far from sprucely

dressed, but apparently a gentleman. As he finished the plaintive ditty, he flourished aloft a stout stick which he carried, and exclaimed :

‘There, Giles, your grandfather couldn’t have beaten that, not with flute, clarionet, and double-bass accompaniment.’

‘No, no, Mr. Gabriel, that he couldn’t to a certainty. He didn’t know that air, however, in fact.’

‘Of course he didn’t,’ replied Gabriel, smiling to himself. ‘It is a grand morning,’ he added, looking around ; ‘just such a morning as makes it the very devil to leave this country-side.’

‘Most beautiful morning. You be a-going back to London then to-day, sir?’

‘Yes, I leave the village at eleven. I came up here for my last constitutional, and to rail at things in general. Why can’t I be you, Giles? I could break stones just as well ; look !’ he said, grasping the larger hammer which lay idle, and

splitting, with a steady blow, one of the largest blocks. 'Your life would just suit me; no wonder you are a philosopher.'

'No philosopher,' replied Radway, laughing and shaking his head; 'very far from it. But I can quite understand you, sir. I shouldn't like to live in a large town myself. I had a desperate wish one day to see the world, but I shall never do it now. I be too old for travelling, and my rheumatics be such a hindrance an' all!'

'You be satisfied where you are, Giles. You are one of the blessed of the earth, depend upon it.'

'So it do appear to me, Mr. Gabriel,' said Giles, looking up wistfully at his companion. 'There be a deal talked nowadays, by the younger men more especially, concerning getting on in towns, and concerning the uncommon dulness of life in the country, but it seems to I but a vain notion at last.'

'Very greatly, I believe it is. The

majority of us must be poor anywhere, but I would rather have poverty in the country than in the town. Nine out of ten that go to towns don't get on at all. Perhaps they come here by a Bank-holiday trip to see you, in a bit better coat than they left in, but they don't tell you how they have managed to buy the coat, or whether it is paid for at all. But never mind this, Giles; I didn't come up here to be dragged into uncomfortable talk by you. We have to make the best of a bad job, or else we fare badly. Just look at those clouds!

‘Most wonderful! I was but looking at them when you came, sir.’

‘Ay, well; I shall think of that sight in the fogs next month,’ remarked Gabriel, after gazing for a few seconds in silence. ‘It is doubtful when I shall see such again, Giles,’ he added, knocking a piece of stone with his stick. ‘I don't suppose I shall be down at Christmas; not unless

things change miraculously, at least— which I don't expect them to do.'

Giles immediately looked his gravest.

'That be bad news, however, sir. We beunt a-going to lose you and Mrs. Bewglass?'

The remark was made in a tone of indirect interrogation, of which this old man was a master.

'No, no; my mother will live here as usual, of course. She couldn't live anywhere else.'

Then followed a short silence. There was, as a rule, but little restraint of intercourse between these widely different men, odd as it may appear; but, during this last holiday sojourn of Gabriel Bewglass in his native village, there had been a topic agitating the minds of both which was scrupulously avoided in their conversation. The young man was the son of the late vicar of the parish, who had died within the last twelve months, and it was some

well-known unsatisfactory circumstances consequent upon that death which was the screened subject of their thoughts. The above remarks constituted a nearer approach to any direct conversational mention of these matters than had hitherto been exchanged between them.

‘I suppose there is plenty of gossip about us, Giles?’ observed Gabriel, presently, apparently with the intention of keeping up the subject now that it had been touched upon. Radway was nothing loath to take the hint.

‘It be much talked about, of course, sir,’ was the reply; ‘being that your father was so much liked in the parish. Without meaning no disrespect, some do say as it be the doing o’ this new man; but I can hardly think that. I know nothing about him, of course, for he don’t come amongst the like o’ we as your father did; but he don’t seem a bad man, not by appearance, however.’

‘He is very far from a bad man. Perhaps not the most ideal parson, but as a man, I believe, essentially worthy. Don’t let that notion go about. It is only a question of law, which as you know, Giles, is not equivalent to charity. It isn’t likely that the law can bother to concern itself with the private heart-ache of individuals.’

‘It seems not, Mr. Gabriel; but, talking of law, it appears a strange affair to I, begging your pardon, sir, that this law concerning dilapidations, as they call them, should apply to a clergyman such as your father was, for I know——’

‘Of course, it must apply to all if to any. But look here, Giles, now we have got upon this miserable topic I will ask you a question. It seems that the largest sum claimed is in respect of the farm buildings of Sedgcomb, old Wayfer’s place, and certainly they are in a disgraceful state. Did you ever hear from Wayfer,

or anybody else, of my father's having allowed him sums of money at different times with which to carry out repairs ?'

'Not a word, Mr. Gabriel, that I didn't,' replied the old man, looking intensely interested, and keeping his lips slightly apart after he had made the statement.

'Well, don't say anything about it, of course. I can trust you. My good father was so incompetent in affairs of business that it is not an unlikely tale. My mother has some vague idea that he mentioned to her that he had done so ; but as Wayfer disclaims it, and as I have no reason to believe him dishonest, I suppose it is a mistake. At any rate, the buildings have never been repaired for a century or two, I should think, whether money was allowed or not. No doubt it is a mistake ; don't say anything about it, especially as the unfortunate Wayfer is probably so near his end. He is no better, I suppose ?'

'I heard this morning as they didn't ex-

pect him to live throughout the day. They fetched Miss Sulby, the school-mistress, to him at six o'clock. He can't abide nobody else near him : most curious man. But he was ever so.'

' Really so bad as that ! He was a strange creature. I remember when I was a boy, I was always afraid of him, and was terrified if I met him in the cop-pice alone.'

Bewglass turned as he spoke to survey the prospect, and as he did so he listened to the distant buzz of a thrashing machine, rising and falling incessantly as it was busily fed with sheaves. A skylark or two also were rising from a stubble-field at hand, and other birds twittered or sang outright from various points around him.

Another sound also there was, which had been audible for a few moments, and which could be heard very far in that morning atmosphere ; namely, the clatter of a horse's hoofs. Gabriel commented upon

it to his companion, and they listened to it for some time in silence.

‘Are the hounds out to-day, Giles? It sounds like somebody late.’

‘I think they be, sir, but I haven’t seen nothing of ’em. He beunt a-losing much time now, that’s certain; and I do believe as he be a-coming up the hill.’

‘Yes, he certainly is. He will be about Mr. Kimble’s buildings.’

This sound, on a sparkling morning, has a peculiarly pleasant effect, and the two took a playful interest in noting its further progress. It was evidently advancing towards them.

‘Now he is under the trees,’ remarked Bewglass, with head erect. ‘I thought that would make him walk. Listen now; he must be reaching the corner. Yes, I can see his hat; he has broken into a trot. I will give him a couple of minutes,’—and Gabriel therewith took out his watch.

The horse came quickly on, with a rider leaning forward on the saddle ; both pairs of eyes were fixed upon him.

‘Why, it’s young Michael Wayfer himself!’ exclaimed Bewglass, as he repocketed his watch.

‘Sure enough,’ assented the roadman, with surprise.

Gabriel stepped aside into the frosted grass to give a wide berth to the animal ; but, as soon as the rider recognized the two figures, he pulled up the bridle sharply. The horse stopped opposite their heap of stones.

‘Come and see my father, Mr. Bewglass,’ exclaimed the horseman, in breathless haste, without any ceremonious prelude. ‘They say he’s dying, and he wants to see you. He *must* see you, he says.’

Bewglass received the summons with calmness enough. He replied, with his customary composure,

‘See me? Certainly, if he wishes it. I’ll go on at once, as I have to leave Shipcombe this morning.’

‘Take this horse,’ said young Wayfer, leaping from the saddle at the moment. ‘Don’t lose no time, sir.’

‘By all means,’ assented the other, taking possession of the vacated seat. ‘I’ll lose no time.’

Nothing suited Gabriel Bewglass better than a scamper on horseback through the clear autumn air, whether to visit a dying man or to discharge any other more cheerful errand. He left Michael Wayfer to exchange some words with Giles Radway by the roadside, while he himself made the best of his way to the farmhouse of Sedgcomb. The distance he had to ride would be about three miles or upwards, seeing that there was no direct cut across the fields. He descended the hill first to the village of Shipcombe, and from the farther end of the village, by the green, he took

the road at right angles which led westwards. In a few minutes he had crossed the two or three fields which separated the house from the road, and was riding into the silent farmyard.

The place seemed unusually silent to Gabriel as the horse's hoofs rang upon the stones. Everything about it appeared conscious of the ominous absence of the master, down to the very sparrows amongst the straw. The fowls strode about and raked amongst the dirt with exceptional silence and deliberation, an occasional grave and inward 'cluck' from a sober, shaggy-legged matron being the only evidence of their presence. Stable doors were closed, and no sound came from within: even the clashing of tin pails and the clattering of servants' boots was not heard through that open doorway in the house. The visitor alone was to be heard as he led the horse across the yard and fastened the bridle to a ring in the wall beside the

door: but there seemed nobody to hear him; his noise attracted nobody's attention. The house itself gave a hollow sound as he stepped on to the flags within, and it would have caused young Bewglass little, if any, surprise, had he found it necessary to go from one empty chamber to another throughout that rambling building to search for the dying man who had summoned him; discovering him, perchance, at last, in the loneliness of death, in some half-furnished, dusky bed-room beneath the rat-eaten rafters.

This, however, did not await him. As soon as he stepped into the 'house,' the large inhabited kitchen so-called, he beheld a middle-aged and a young female engaged quietly in some menial employment there, whilst an elderly woman dozed by the fire. They scarcely raised an eye to him as he entered; certainly showed not the slightest disposition to address him. The two went on quietly with their

work, as though ignorant of his presence, and the third continued to doze. Gabriel, therefore, must take the initiative himself.

‘Can I see Mr. Wayfer?’ he demanded of the elder of the active women.

‘Dunt knaw, sir,’ she replied.

‘Is anybody with him?’

‘Iss, Miss—but ’ere her be.’

The colloquy was interrupted by the silent entrance of a young lady to the room.

‘I thought it would be you, Mr. Bewglass. Will you come upstairs at once?’

‘Are you alone with him, Miss Sulby?’ the young man asked, as they ascended the creaky staircase.

‘Yes. His daughters won’t come. But I don’t think he could do with them if they did. The doctor will be here in a moment; he wants to see you before the doctor comes.’

‘He is quite collected, I suppose?’

‘Oh, yes; but he will not live long, I

am sure. I am glad you had not gone, Mr. Bewglass.'

They went along a passage, the floor of which was covered with a strip of worn-out oil-cloth, and the walls, which were without paper, sadly required a fresh coat of white-wash. Miss Sulby, as the young lady seemed to be called, glided softly through an open doorway at the end of this passage, and young Bewglass followed. He then found himself in a bed-room, presumably the invalid's, for fearsome sounds were audible. It was a large, bare room, with a patch of carpet by the bedside only, and necessary furniture of the very plainest description. The bed, however, was a massive oaken four-poster, devoid of hangings, and at the foot of it lay a large black oak chest, with lid and sides curiously carved. The ceiling was the shape of the roof, the great white-washed rafters sloping to the shallow mulioned windows, before which the blinds

were drawn. A man endeavoured to raise himself at the sound of footsteps, but immediately sank again with a despairing groan. The young lady went up to him.

‘Be that young Bewglass?’ he said, in a husky voice.

‘Yes, Mr. Wayfer; will you speak to him now?’

‘Eess, leave him wi’ me; but dunt ’e gwo far off.’

Miss Sulby accordingly left the room, and closed the door behind her. Gabriel took the chair by the bed-side.

‘Not so well this morning, Mr. Wayfer?’ he observed, feeling by no means at home in his present unaccustomed employment.

‘Noa, I’ll never be well again,—never again. Mebbe I ’ev time to tell ’e. I’ve telled Michael. I dwunt knaw where I be a-going to, Mr. Bewglass,’ he said, with an apparent transference of thought, as he turned his gaunt old hopeless visage towards his visitor. ‘Eh, if I could but

know that ! I never knawed right about heaven and hell ; never could give my mind to it from a boy ; never had no abilities at it, never. I were always given to the farmin' line. Miss Sulby be a-teaching me a bit, but I be desperd backard. But what am I a-maundering over ? That beunt the affair as I wanted to ask 'e about. Beunt ye the son of Mr. Bewglass, the parson ? Of course 'e be. Miss Sulby says as I must ask forgiveness for anything as I 'ev done wrong. 'Ullt forgive me, Mr. Bewglass ? I never knawed as 'em 'ud come against you when he were dead.'

'I don't know of any wrong you have done to me, Mr. Wayfer.'

'Beunt 'em a-suing you for the money to repair my buildings ? You came to ask me about it a while since.'

'Yes, they are ; at least they are suing my father's executors.'

'Well, I had the money out o' the rent

from your father. Eess, I had it, and that be the truth. They'd ought to ha' been the best buildings i' the parish, and I meant to ha' done it; but times got bad—times got desperd bad, and I never did it—never.'

The man had to stop to recover his breath. Gabriel waited for a moment and then spoke.

'You really had it, then. How much did you have?'

'Michael—'ev the figures; ur 'll make it up to 'e. I meant to do it, that I did. Will 'e forgive me before I go? Egh, if I could but knaw where I be a-going to! It be so dark sometimes, uncommon dark.'

'Certainly, I will forgive you readily enough, if it will do you any good. You need not let that affair trouble you.'

'Michael 'ull make it up to 'e. Dunt be hard on him, times be bad, Mr. Bewglass. Ye said ye'd forgive me?'

The old man seemed to experience a

strong sense of relief as Gabriel repeated the word 'forgive.' It seemed to be to the sound of that word alone, as issuing from the young man's lips, that the dying figure clung, and without any thought of associating with it a contributory feeling in himself. His eyes grew less painfully eager.

'Her said as I must ask to be forgiven,' he continued to mutter to himself, 'and he have said the word. I dwunt feel so dismal; but I dwunt know what kind o' land it be. Ull 'em 'ev the four-field or the six-field system, Mr. Bewglass? Egh! I be over old to start on new land; I'll never get such a good sample o' barley as off the Old Knolls, never; ye couldn't beat it in all Cotsol', and I never heard tell of a better barley country. 'St know what breed o' sheep 'em have? Them white-faced divils, I'll warr'nd, and I never could abide 'em: 'em never looked kind i' my pasture.'

Bewglass was far from a nervous man, but he was deeply impressed by this ghastly figure mumbling of the unknown fields. He would gladly have helped him, but how hopeless was all effort! How could he direct this mind into any reasonable channel? Now that the purpose of his errand was accomplished, and he had given the man his shrift, further delay seemed useless. He rose, therefore, quietly from his chair, with the intention of withdrawing unobserved from the chamber, a course which seemed to offer little difficulty, insomuch as the man was absorbed in his confused speculations upon the future. However, it was not so easy as he expected. At the first movement of his visitor old Wayfer was drawn from his entangled train of thought, and he fixed his eyes upon the stalwart Gabriel by his side. He stretched out his hand towards him, but from it Bewglass involuntarily shrank. Perhaps he felt a momentary return of that boyish

fear of which he had spoken. The dying man started up at the movement, and sat erect for the space of a second. He made an effort to utter some words, but they could not escape from his throat; then he fell back again upon the pillow. Bewglass hurriedly left the room.

The doctor had ridden away, and Gabriel and Miss Sulby were crossing the farmyard. By the gate through which they would have to pass two men were standing, one of whom was young Michael Wayfer. They appeared to be engaged in an altercation, for their voices were loud and rough, and by the movement of Wayfer's arms it seemed likely to end in blows.

‘Get off the premises, I tell you! You shan’t see him at all. By gum, I’ll put you off!’

‘You can’t see him now, Riley,’ said Bewglass, coming up; ‘not if you want to speak to him. He’s dead.’

Both men stared at him in amazement, as though the news was the most unexpected in the world.

‘Dead!’

‘Yes, he is dead; so you may as well cease your quarrelling.’

The man, whom Bewglass had named Riley, and who appeared of the labouring class, muttered an imprecation at the news and turned with much sullenness away. Wayfer put a question or two to Miss Sulby, then she and Gabriel departed, leaving the young farmer standing by the gate.

Neither spoke until they were half-way across the first field, when Bewglass broke the silence.

‘Was that some family quarrel, Miss Sulby?’

‘Evidently,’ she replied; ‘but nothing new between them. It is a notorious house for feuds. I don’t think any two members of it hold intercourse of any

kind. I don't know what Riley could want there, for the old man disliked him and his wife more than all the rest. It is a dreadful state of things.'

'I suppose it is,' remarked Gabriel; 'but I must say it amuses me. Such incredible compositions!'

The school-mistress made no reply. She seemed much subdued; no doubt affected by her recent impressive experiences. Moreover, she was unable to view things in this light manner, and perhaps she was grieved by anybody else being able to do so. Her eyes were, for the most part, fixed upon the grass as they walked, and she gave very short replies to any observation from her companion. When they reached the road, and the subject of their conversation changed, Miss Sulby aroused herself somewhat.

'I am glad I did not miss this experience, for, at the risk of shocking you, Miss Sulby, I must say it was picturesque.

Two hours later, and I should have left the village.'

'You go to-day, of course,' said the young lady, not referring to the first part of his remarks.

'Yes; go back to imprisonment. It concerns me to leave my mother so poorly, but private feelings have to be smothered just now. She is not amongst aliens. You for one will see her occasionally, won't you?'

'It is the chief happiness of my life to have the friendship of Mrs. Bewglass. I am afraid of tiring her by going so often.'

'Never fear that. She thinks it a kindness, and enjoys nothing better. She must feel it very lonely. You can't go to her too often, I can assure you of that. I wish I could look in myself sometimes.'

'I suppose you do, Mr. Bewglass. You don't seem to care much for your town life.'

‘I don’t seem to care for any, Miss Sulby. I have no doubt I should be sick of the country in six months.’

‘I don’t think you would,’ replied the school-mistress. ‘You malign yourself to say so.’

‘You have got a better opinion of me than I have myself, I know. It is an old quarrel. I did think I should succeed in exposing myself this time; you refuse “proof controvertible” of my barbarous irresoluteness.’

‘I had got some little way towards a change of opinion, I must say, until I heard you read the ballads that evening; that put me again into my old state of perplexity. You will not persuade me that you would suffer *ennui* in the country, Mr. Bewglass.’

‘You are very difficult to persuade of anything. I suppose it is your habitual attitude of authority which makes you so dogmatical. You feel that we are all

pupils and that we have no right to influence your decisions.'

'That is a character I least desire to have, and I hope it is not my true one,' said Miss Sulby, smiling.

'True enough, I assure you. Brood over it. No, I'm not going in; I want to see Mr. Kimble, and I mustn't waste much time about it. I will walk up with you, if I may?'

They walked on together so far as the school-house, continuing the train of conversation into which they had drifted, and, just as they were separating, Mr. Kimble himself came down the road. Bewglass joined him, and they walked down the village in active conversation, turning together through the garden-gate before a picturesque cottage, the residence of Mrs. Bewglass.

In less than half-an-hour Gabriel Bewglass was in a dog-cart on his way to the market-town, which was the nearest point

at which he could join the railway, feeling as prepared as he ever was for a succession of months in a dingy government office. That night he was reading an evening newspaper in the crowd assembled before the pit entrance of a theatre in the Strand.

CHAPTER II.

RE JONATHAN WAYFER, DECEASED.

As the clock of the abbey church chimed the quarters over the quiet little town of Dormantley, Miss Ruth Sulby was coming out of the yard of the 'Chequers Inn.' She had done what shopping she had found necessary, and had packed her parcels safely under the seat of Mr. Kimble's dog-cart, which lay in the inn-yard; still it wanted half-an-hour to the time of her appointment at the lawyer's office. It was half-past two that had gone.

From having seen Miss Sulby in attendance upon the death-bed of that rugged old farmer, it will hardly be supposed that

she was of a nervous temperament ; nevertheless, she was conscious of an uncomfortable fluttering sensation as this particular hour approached. In such a feeling itself, perhaps, there was nothing remarkable. All women dislike entering a lawyer's office, or at least experience a feeling of peculiar nervousness if ever called upon to do so. Perhaps the sternly practical nature of this kind of business may be especially antagonistic to the sympathetic view of the universe in which most women habitually dwell ; or possibly the conventional myths concerning the legal race, so long deeply rooted in the popular mind, have something to do with the continuance of this nervous attitude towards it. Whatever the cause of the general feeling, we need not seek any abstract explanation of it in this particular case. Miss Sulby's reasons for feeling nervous were peculiar to herself.

Anxious to escape to some unfrequented

corner in which to pass the intervening time, Ruth went in the direction of the parish church. She walked quickly along the pavement of Cowl Street, and disappeared through the ancient archway beneath the black-timbered gable under which, in all probability, some of the unsuppressed abbots had passed. Then she found herself in the quiet green churchyard through which the public footpath went, and beyond which was a large pasture-field sloping to the river. This was retired enough. That Abbot's Gateway was the line of separation between two worlds. At one step she had traversed a period of several centuries. Here again was the repose of monastic times, a state of things which apparently offered peculiar attractions to the school-mistress of Shipcombe. Even the wind did not seem to have the right of entrance to the place. It could be heard whistling in those giant, leafless elm-trees by the vicarage gateway, and

seemed to snort through the nostrils of those hideous gargoyles ; but to the silent graveyard it was unable to descend.

Miss Sulby's mind was so preoccupied to-day that she was not conscious of much beyond the loneliness and quiet of the place. The thought of the coming interview precluded all others of a more picturesque and imaginative kind. Absently she traversed the gravel pathway, regardless of the lettered tomb-stones upon each side of it, which usually engaged so much of her attention. It was not until there was another clanging of the quarters from the belfry that she was aroused. At the sound of the bells she stopped, and looked to the ground as she listened. In doing so her eyes fell upon a particular gravestone, which was close beside the pathway, and it appeared at once to influence her thoughts. A harassed look, which had hitherto ruffled her refined features, left her, and it was gradually re-

placed by one of serene contemplation. That stone interested her; as a matter of fact, it always had interested her: she could never pass through the graveyard without musing upon it.

As she looked down at the stone, it was seen of how deep a tinge of reflection her features were susceptible. I have called them refined, and they unquestionably were so. Her face bore the stamp of intellect most subtly blended with feeling. Judging from this particular moment, the latter quality seemed to have predominance, but the way in which the full-formed lips were normally closed showed that it acknowledged the restraint of the former. With regard to the mere form of her features, they were well, but not faultlessly made. The general appearance was attractive, made especially so by a pair of expressive blue-grey eyes. The cheeks, perhaps, were somewhat wanting in fulness, but they were of an unmistakably healthy tint.

That stone was simple enough, impressive as it seemed to Miss Sulby. It was but a flat slab upon the ground, and bore a very short legend on its surface. There was no name of the dead; no number of her years. All the record of the one buried there was in these few words, into the carved letters of which the bright green moss had long since crept: 'In memory of a gentle and very dear wife.' Nothing more was to be learned of her. Ruth Sulby had never asked for more. She felt in fact that the mention of ephemeral details would have impaired the stone's significance.

How long the school-mistress would have thus remained in meditation it would be hard to say. She was not actually a dreamer, although she occasionally allowed her thoughts to range pretty much at will. Upon the subject of this gravestone, it is possible that they might have had exceptional licence, had not an incident occurred which was to put a stop to all abstract

thinking. She was suddenly recalled to herself by the sound of a footstep on the path, evidently at no great distance from herself. She turned in the direction of it, and a positive frown disturbed the serenity of her countenance. A man was approaching her. A vision of the lawyer's office again possessed her. Sentiment fled afar.

Upon a closer inspection of him, the intruder ought to be recognizable. His garments were misleading: it is Mr. Michael Wayfer. He was indeed the same individual who, as a breathless horseman, had accosted young Bewglass on the road several weeks before. That spruce black clothing in which he was now dressed removed all appearance of affinity with the soil, such as his working-day garb undoubtedly presented. He came up to her and stopped. No kind of greeting was exchanged, and from the abrupt opening of their conversation it was evident that this

was not the first occasion of their conversing to-day.

‘Aren’t you going to the office, then, Miss Sulby?’ said Wayfer when beside her.

‘Yes, I am,’ was the reply, made, not in anger, but with the emphasis of a resolution quite recently formed.

‘It is time to be going,’ he said, looking up at the church tower. ‘Won’t you—’

‘I shall come presently. I would rather go alone.’

‘O, well, of course, if you would—mind, they shall not say anything to annoy you; if they do, I’ll make ’em pay for it, that I will.’

‘Do not trouble about me, Mr. Wayfer. It will not matter what they say.’

Wayfer turned to walk away, not particularly well pleased with Miss Sulby’s tone. But, looking round, he said:

‘You might as well——’

‘I shall go alone,’ she said again, this time decisively.

‘Very well;’ and he strode away without further effort at persuasion.

As he passed through the Abbot’s Gateway, the clock again told the quarters: four times, and then the big bell struck three. A few seconds after, the chimes were lazily playing ‘Barbara Allen,’ the strains of which were but rudely handled by the wind.

From Cowl Street Ruth passed into the High Street, and here was that moderate degree of activity which distinguished market day in Dormantley as in other little agricultural towns. The easterly Martinmas wind, which came sweeping with such determination along the wide thoroughfare, could not quite succeed in making the people hurry about their vocations, although it did prevent the majority from standing to talk at street corners. The women and girls, with their poultry and dairy produce, or heaps of green vegetables, who occupied the cobble-

paved space between the foot-pavement and roadway, were rubbing their hands and stamping their feet as Ruth passed by them, making it plain that they received indifferent shelter from the row of carriers' and farm-carts which occupied the bleak space by the ready-cash grocer's at the corner. Even the sheep beyond looked cold, huddled together in their temporary pens; and, as was only too obvious from their noses, the men who tended the cattle standing there had their own opinions as to their masters' conduct in not availing themselves of the new covered-in mart which the enterprising local auctioneer had recently built solely for their use and benefit. It added neither to their nor to Ruth's comfort that the roadway of the ancient High Street was macadamized, and that, dark and dry and smooth as it seemed, the wind had only swept up the gritty dust into those insignificant dappled patches in order the better to whisk them up into

unoffending eyes just when their owners were least expecting it.

At last Miss Sulby had passed the busiest part, and was drawing near to a row of houses which, from the shrubs within the railings and the ivy and virginia-creeper which grew up the fronts, seemed to be private dwelling houses. Most of them were, but one was rendered more conspicuous than the rest by bearing a brass plate upon the railings. At this one Ruth stopped, and then turned rather precipitately through the gateway.

The young lady was not accustomed to the unceremonious usages of business, so that she timidly knocked at the inner door, on the glass pane of which was the word 'Clerks.' She was bidden enter from within in that blunt tone of voice peculiar to the race of junior clerks. Ruth did not know what to say when she had entered, so that the boy and the thin, tall youth, who were writing at the desk there, stared

at her for a second or two with an ill-repressed twinkle in their eyes. The young lawyer's-clerk enjoys peculiar privileges with regard to young ladies of his own particular circle, which perhaps accounts for his free-and-easy air with womankind in general. Miss Sulby got off easily, owing to her good looks, and perhaps partly also to the look of gravity which still marked her face.

‘Miss Sulby from Shipcombe?’ asked the tall youth, interrogatively, when he had eyed the visitor long enough.

He always kept up with the appointments at the office, and he knew what *re* was on hand for three o'clock to-day. He had, in fact, himself copied the letters sent to the various persons in connection with it.

‘Yes,’ replied Ruth.

‘Come this way, please.’

Ruth followed him through a doorway and upstairs, the clerk leading with

three steps at a time. At the head of the stairs was another door (doors, of course, are an especial feature of a lawyer's office), and this one the clerk opened with one hand whilst he pretended to knock with the other.

‘Miss Sulby, sir,’ he said, and made way for Ruth to enter.

Then he was heard to descend the stairs in two bounds, the friction of his hands upon the bannister-rail and the varnished paper being distinctly audible. He took his place upon his stool in the manner customary to well-conditioned clerks;—the action is the same as in leap-frog, only, instead of clearing the object bestridden, the body is skilfully placed upon it where the hands have rested. Which feat performed, he turned to look at his admiring junior, and said, with a peculiar movement of one eyelid,

‘Oh, jam!’

‘Is that a friend of yours, Spindles?’ asked the boy.

‘Boy!’ returned Spindles, sharply, ‘how often must I tell you that I’m *Mister* to you, if you please?’

Mr. Spindles was appeased, and the two proceeded to discuss amicably the charms of the young lady from Shipcombe.

Meanwhile, Miss Sulby had taken the chair which was offered her, and was timidly looking about. The gentleman who was in authority, and whom she naturally took to be the lawyer, (he was in reality only the superior clerk, and was unadmitted to the full dignity of a Solicitor of the Supreme Court,) was of middle age and genial manners, with perhaps a slight tendency to what is generally called self-importance. There were five people in the room besides, arranged on chairs in front of the dusky book-case, two men and three women. The latter were ostentatiously clothed in ill-fitting, mourning habili-

ments. Amongst the males was Mr. Michael Wayfer.

The sound of eager, not to say angry, voices had suddenly ceased as the last comer had entered the room. Nobody present, except Mr. Philpin, the lawyer's representative, could pretend to be in a good temper. Indeed, it is remarkable how great a quantity of ill-temper and ill-feeling of every kind can be brought together at a meeting of the beneficiaries of a small estate. This is perhaps the best opportunity for seeing a display of the essential, pitiful meanness of uncultivated human nature. That an estate should have to be *divided* at all seems to be the peculiar grievance of each party, and from this general standpoint much difference of opinion upon mere minor details very naturally follows. Not unfrequently it happens that two or more of those interested sink their own original cause of difference, and wage common war upon one who possesses

a greater claim to their animosity than that existing between each other. The combination generally proves to be between those equally low in the scale of legatees against one or more of those above them. An extraordinary amount of unwritten family history is disclosed upon these occasions, mostly in the form of accusation and rejoinder. Motives are attributed and conduct brought under review, from a period so very remote that it would seem to be taken for granted by those engaged that their whole course of domestic life from infancy until then had been ordered with a view to this one particular hour.

The commonest form of accusation is, of course, that of undue influence over the immediate testator. That alone is capable of a great variety of colours, but all are alike in leading to mere wholesale personal abuse. There are more technical causes of complaint, which lead at least to some

semblance of an argument, but which can only delay for a season the inevitable termination. It is these which give extension to the causes of discontent, and carry back the argument to a former generation. The testator's title is impugned; old quarrels are revived; it was well known that he imposed upon somebody, or was at best a fraudulent trustee. Aunt Sally, that weak-minded sister of his, for whom he promised to provide; that—O, an inexhaustible list of crimes and misdemeanours of such a nature as can easily be imagined; and the long-concealed knowledge of which has, if they only knew it, constituted in those very accusers the high offence of misprision of felony to which penalties are attached.

Amongst the various sources of disagreement it does not fall to the lot of every estate to possess such a satisfactory one as in the case of this family of Wayfer. It produced a remarkable unanimity amongst

the discontented ones, and the innocent cause of it was none other than Miss Ruth Sulby. All family differences were for the time lost sight of in her enormities. The three women in mourning, who were sisters, all married daughters of the deceased Wayfer, could positively find some topic upon which they were heartily agreed. It is unreasonable enough, surely, that one should be deprived of a few pounds by a brother or a sister; but it is a step too far that one should suffer it at the hands of an utter stranger. Mr. Jonathan Wayfer, the testator, had so far forgotten himself as to bequeath a legacy of two hundred pounds to 'Ruth Sulby, school-mistress of Shipcombe aforesaid, in remembrance of her very great kindness to me,' as the words of the will had it; left some of his money, in short, to a person other than those who had been actually expecting it, and who were consequently

the only ones in any way entitled to it.

So strong was the feeling of resentment in the injured ones that they could forget much of the rancour with which they regarded the objectionable relative the half-brother. That was the Michael Wayfer already mentioned, who was not much more than half their age: for the testamentary dispositions of the late Wayfer were not the only causes of discontent which he had brought into his family. Blessed with three buxom daughters—all of whom were married, by the way—he had, nevertheless, comparatively late in life, thought fit to take a second wife, with the consequence of adding this half-brother to his family. Here on the face of it were not the elements of warm family unity.

It was into the polluted atmosphere naturally surrounding such a state of circumstances that Miss Sulby had at this moment stepped. The voices had ceased

at her entrance, but looks had not changed. As Ruth took her chair, one of the sisters greeted her with,

‘You’ve kep us awaiting, Miss Sulby, I hope you know.’

‘Not many minutes, Mrs. Riley,’ interposed Mr. Philpin, who had viewed Ruth with interest and seemed inclined to take her part. ‘We are all here now, and will proceed to business.’

With this he took up some papers from the table, and stood on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire. He then placed one hand upon his bald forehead (it was bald, but of course to himself only unusually high) as he began to broach the matter in hand.

‘Shall I read the will, Mr. Crump?’ he said, looking towards the senior executor. ‘Very good,’ in reply to a chorus of noes. ‘You all know the terms of it. Quite a simple, straightforward will. I drew it myself, and may say that—but no matter.

The executors have realized the estate, ladies, in the terms of the will, the net result being—pounds shillings and pence.’ Mr. Philpin read details from the account which he held in his hand: then followed details of the incidental expenses: and finally the amount remaining in hand for division amongst those entitled under the will.

All heard him in silence thus far, and the three proceeded to scrutinize the account which he passed round for their inspection.

‘Yes, that be right enough,’ exclaimed one of the sisters, as the three heads were raised up simultaneously from the document. ‘That beunt what I’ve got to quarrel with.’

‘Then the amount is divided as follows, according to the terms of the will,’ proceeded Mr. Philpin, looking at another foolscap sheet which he held out before him. ‘To Mr. Michael Wayfer one thousand pounds——’

‘As well as all the farm stock,’ interposed Mrs. Bonaker, firmly.

‘And the lease o’ the place and all them crops just got in,’ added Mrs. Riley, with less control over her feelings.

‘Nay, don’t speak, Susannah,’ said Mrs. Creed, the third sister; ‘how any father could beshame——’

‘Well, you can’t alter the will anyhow,’ exclaimed Mr. Crump, impatiently. ‘Let us get on.’

‘To Miss Ruth Sulby two hundred pounds,’ continued Mr. Philpin.

‘That be my item!’ cried Mrs. Riley, snatching at it like a pike at a bait. ‘How comes her to have all that money?’

‘By the will, of course,’ said Philpin, showing much surprise. ‘No, no, Miss Sulby——’

‘But they tell me as her can’t take it,’ exclaimed Mrs. Bonaker, ‘seeing how her ’ve got hold of it.’

‘Now, stop your noise,’ interposed young

Wayfer, looking fiercely at his defiant sisters.

Ruth had risen from her chair as soon as her name was mentioned, and had said something to Mr. Philpin which the other voices had prevented from being generally heard. She continued standing whilst the ensuing contest arose around her; only endeavouring to speak to Mr. Philpin when any opportunity offered.

The three sisters repeated their objections simultaneously, but in different keys. Young Wayfer confronted them in a threatening attitude and with loud voice. The quasi-lawyer endeavoured to interpose. He was prepared for high words, of course, but hardly for actual opposition to the will.

‘Her can’t take it,’ cried all the women together.

‘What—what do you mean?’ said Mr. Philpin. ‘Do you oppose the will? You should have lodged a caveat. You can’t

contest the will now. Here's probate under seal, and the executors are bound——'

'Her can't take it. I know the law.'

'I have never had the intention of taking it,' interposed Ruth, whose face was flushed and her lip quivered. 'I came here to say so.'

It was scarcely audible.

'If a bad woman influences an old man when ur beunt over strong,' continued Mrs. Riley.

'Come, come, Mrs. Riley, that won't do here,' said Mr. Philpin, who in truth was hardly equal to the occasion; 'slander—actionable words. We have no evidence before us——'

His voice was drowned by the altercation which was proceeding between two of the sisters and Michael Wayfer, the latter of whom, true to his promise, was taking up the cudgels on Miss Sulby's behalf.

'I'll have you all before the magistrates, if you say another word against her,'

shouted the young man. 'You never come near the old man when he is alive—'

'*You* took good care as only young women did come about him,' shrieked one of his opponents. 'We know all about you, young man. It's you as ought to go before the magistrates, and will do afore long by the looks o' things.'

What would have been the result of the contest under the feeble management of Mr. Philpin it is difficult to say. Fortunately, at this moment, he received a valuable reinforcement in the person of his principal, who had just come into the office and was drawn to his chief clerk's room by the unusual noise proceeding from it. Three or four voices were at their height as the lawyer opened the door, but all ceased as he came forward into the room. His brows were knit and his hat still on his head.

'What's this uproar about, Mr. Philpin?' said the principal, casting his eye

upon the assembly, and particularly upon Ruth who was still standing by her chair.

‘Re Jonathan Wayfer, deceased, sir,’ was all the reply the clerk gave in a dolorous tone of voice.

Mrs. Riley speedily informed him of more, and the lawyer at once saw the nature of the situation.

‘Is this the young lady whose legacy is disputed?’ he said, looking at Ruth.

‘Young lady, indeed!’ cried Mrs. Bonaker, ‘I be told as *such* young ladies can’t take a legacy. Beunt that law, sir?’

To this both Mrs. Riley and Mrs. Creed saw fit to answer.

‘Silence!’ cried the lawyer, angrily. ‘If any of you speak another word, I’ll pack you all out of the office instantly. This isn’t a pot-house, remember.’

The women’s eyes showed rebellion, but they gave in to the air of command.

‘Now, Miss Sulby, have you got any-

thing to say upon the matter in hand?' the gentleman asked.

'I don't wish to take the money, sir,' she replied. 'I came here to say so.'

All the women stared; this was the first time they had heard Ruth's words.

'Not take it! But the money is yours; nobody can deprive you of it. It says in the will "in remembrance of very great kindness." You must take it, of course.'

Somebody raised a voice, but was silenced by a look from the lawyer.

'I would rather not take it, sir. I am not obliged to take it, am I?'

'Well, the executors must pay it to you, but of course you can do what you like with it when you have got it. Don't pay any heed to what these people say. From my knowledge of old Mr. Wayfer, I know that you wouldn't have got it if you had not deserved it.'

'Anyone but his own family,' ventured

Mrs. Creed. 'Eh, my ! that a parent——'

'It was nothing, sir,' muttered Miss Sulby, modestly.

'Come now, think better of it and take the money ; you will find it useful at some time of your life.'

Miss Sulby appeared to acquiesce, and went up to the table to sign the papers as directed by Mr. Philpin. When she had done so, the latter handed her a bundle of bank-notes which made up the amount of her legacy. Ruth's hand trembled as she took them, and perhaps she was paler than usual. She looked across at the scowling women, then walked towards them with a firm step. She dropped the notes in the lap of Mrs. Riley, with just an appearance of having thrown them, and said, as she did so,

'Take the money, Mrs. Riley. I never meant to touch a farthing of it, but they made me. It is yours now.—May I go now, sir ?' she continued, turning to the lawyer.

‘Ye-es,’ he answered, quite taken aback by the unusual incident. ‘You have nothing more, Mr. Philpin?’

‘No, sir.’

The lawyer hastened to open the door for Ruth, and she hurriedly left the office.

‘Wh-what am I to do with all this?’ cried Mrs. Riley, who was sitting motionless with her mouth open.

‘Whatever you like,’ replied the gentleman, with perhaps too little restraint over his feelings. ‘It is yours now, at any rate, and I hope it will do you much good. Come, Mr. Philpin, get the business finished and send them away.’

Mr. Philpin, who was a man of unusual sensibility, had been more amazed than his principal by the course things had taken, and it took him some seconds to collect himself. However, the lawyer’s words recalled him, and, as that gentleman left the room, the interrupted business was proceeded with. Papers were signed and

the other shares distributed in a remarkably short space of time. All the women were unusually subdued, but significant looks were turned upon Mrs. Riley by her less fortunate sisters, and no doubt the last words upon the transaction were yet to come. Young Wayfer sat in dogged, scowling silence; and Mr. Crump, the senior executor, was very anxious to be assured that no responsibility attached to the legal representatives of the estate. When he was fully convinced of this, the incident had little more concern for him. He was glad to get off about his business, and vowed that it should be the last time of his undertaking any such thankless office as that of executor or trustee.

‘What are you going to do, Susannah?’ asked Mrs. Creed, when the business was at an end, and they were preparing to leave the office. ‘It’s the queerest affair as I ever heard tell of.’

‘I be perplexed in a manner,’ replied

Mrs. Riley. 'They can't say as it's my doing, however.'

'That they can't,' assented Mrs. Bonaker, in doubtful humour. 'If it's one it's three; and they as bear the blame should share——'

'Are you sure it's quite lawful, Mr. Philpin?' eagerly inquired Mrs. Riley again, not heeding her sister's unexpected comment upon her former remark. 'I wouldn't go contrary to law. I'm sure I'd never a thought of such a thing; that I hadn't.'

'Lawful enough; mere personalty; it goes by delivery,' replied Philpin, bluntly, as he tied up the bundle of papers at the table. He spoke as if his thoughts were elsewhere.

The two men had already left the office, but the women seemed to have some hesitation in doing so. They stood talking by the doorway of Mr. Philpin's room, and Mrs. Riley required to be once more assured of the legality of her method of acquiring

this money. She appeared to have a lingering suspicion of herself, notwithstanding the repeated assurance, and she was the last of the three to leave the room. She was going through again in her mind every stage of the proceedings, and she was really unable to see that there was any blame attaching to her. She could see Ruth standing there, with the heightened colour in her cheeks, making no attempt at reply to the gross accusations brought against her ; and for some reason, as Mrs. Riley contemplated the figure, she did not feel able to regard it with that strong degree of righteous indignation of which she was at first conscious, and which she so well knew was the young woman's due. At last the top stair cracked under the portly step, and Mrs. Riley descended, at a measured pace, with much squeaking of boots and rustling of her black gown. Mr. Spindles and the boy were of course at the window to see her depart, and her

two sisters awaited her at the doorstep. The three walked away together, talking as only three such beneficiaries can talk. Mr. Philpin was now at liberty to follow his reflections.

Miss Sulby had gone back to the inn and was sitting in a room there awaiting Mr. Kimble. This gentleman, who was a principal farmer at Shipcombe, had driven her in his dog-cart to the town, and she was to be taken home in the same manner. In her present state of feeling, she would rather have fled from the town and walked home, notwithstanding the seven good miles of hilly road which lay between. At first it was but a passing thought, then an inclination requiring some resistance. Very soon it was on the point of having its own way. She could not endure the sitting still there. There was more than half-an-hour before Mr. Kimble's time for departure. For obvious reasons, she dared not walk about the streets to-day. At

last go she must. She left a message for the farmer with the landlady, and then went out into the street.

She encountered nobody whom she was anxious to avoid, and she was soon upon the old stone bridge over the river. She glanced at the water as she passed over, and turned round to look at the picturesque town which she was leaving. Then another look at the water,—the river was full and very muddy, rolling lazily along determined not to be bullied out of its usual pace by all the autumn rains and a crew of impatient tributaries to boot,—and finally Ruth stepped over the parish boundary. The few outlying houses were soon passed, and then her eyes were fixed upon the bare orchards and market gardens which stretched along the roadside for the first mile beyond the town: then upon the ridge of hills in the distance before her, at the foot of which lay the village that she had to reach.

Miss Sulby's face brightened as she looked at this prospect, and the piercing wind seemed to drive out the thoughts which had been troubling her throughout the day. Dull and cold as it was, and cheerless as the country looked, beneath the dark ridges of unbroken clouds which were scudding over, it exercised some strong and joyous influence over the young, observant school-mistress. She did not seem to feel the want of colour, either in sky or field. The fragrant breath of mere honest earth, taking its ease after the months of labour, seemed to give her as much satisfaction as all the perfumes of overladen summer. She walked on briskly with a light step.

Before she had got beyond the first hill, Mr. Kimble overtook her and they rode back together to their quiet village of Shipcombe.

CHAPTER III.

TWO ELDERS.

MICHAEL WAYFER was in a state of angry perplexity when he left the lawyer's office. The conduct of the school-mistress had amazed him : he could make nothing whatever of it.

The moral of that old story about the chameleon and its disputed colour is capable of extensive application. As we are all well aware, everybody's spectacles are of a different colour. White to me may be black to you, reader, red to a third, whilst the fourth will with oaths pronounce it green.

It was not a matter of contested colour

exactly which exercised the mind of Wayfer; the difficulty in his case was the recognition of any colour at all. At first sight he was unable to conceive any conditions under which he should have acted as Miss Sulby had done, therefore the situation was unintelligible to him. He was grappling with it throughout the whole of that afternoon's market, and again as he ambled along on his way homewards to Shipcombe. It was in fact all owing to this that the young farmer's horse was allowed to make such a leisurely journey of it.

Wayfer was just now particularly interested in Miss Sulby personally; why else his unusual curiosity about her motives? He was no more given to the analysis of psychological problems in an abstract spirit than any other man of average capacity. His greatest intellectual effort lay in the parry and thrust of agricultural commercial life,—a branch of

business no whit less a matter of mutually attempted circumvention than other departments of the mercantile world. Young as he was, (at this time about five-and-twenty,) from natural aptitude well trained, this man was every bit as successful in the game as his more experienced neighbours, if seasons and prices would only have allowed him to benefit by his shrewdness. Such being the basis of his inner life, it is not surprising that Ruth's conduct was to him difficult of comprehension. She had clearly nothing to get by giving up a legacy of two hundred pounds.

What made the matter the more perplexing was that Wayfer looked for exceptional motives in all the conduct of the school-mistress. He was aware that she was essentially different from himself, and further, was different from other women of his acquaintance. His attention had been drawn to her during her benevolent attentions to his dying father, and no little

personal annoyance to Miss Sulby had been the result of his consideration. To analyze the man's exact feelings towards her would have been an undertaking of no small difficulty. That they savoured somewhat of a tender quality was to be supposed from his outward behaviour towards her. Nor could they wholly depend upon that legacy of two hundred pounds ; for, if it had been so, he would as easily have flung her from his imagination as she had flung the bank-notes from her hand. It would be difficult to say, though, that the money had had no part in giving a turn to his inclinations. All Wayfer tradition would have been violated had it been otherwise.

But for this feeling of uncertainty with regard to the nature with which he had to deal, doubtless Wayfer would the sooner have come to the inevitable conclusion that the school-mistress had relinquished her money simply out of fear ; bullied out of it by the savage treatment of those three

half-sisters of his. He was, of course, compelled to come to it at last as much out of sheer despair of finding any other explanation as of the element of hope which such a conclusion carried with it. Such a tangible motive did not preclude all thought of remedy.

The farmer was nearing the village of Shipcombe when he came to this understanding with himself. The wind was still howling from the east, and whistling through the bare elm-trees. The dark clouds seemed to be drawing nearer to the earth as the hour of evening came on. Indeed, it was already twilight under the great avenue which shaded the road near the entrance to the village. At this point Wayfer pulled himself together and urged his horse to a sharp trot. He turned off by the chestnut-tree upon the green, not entering the village. He glanced up the street as he passed, but there was nobody to be seen. It did not occur to him that

there might be something else worthy of observation. The handful of picturesque old houses were but mortar and stones, possibly in need of considerable repair; the hill which formed their background only a very serious nuisance in the face of agricultural employment carried on near the summit. After a short ride the young man leaned down to open a gate in the hedgerow with his riding-whip, then slammed it behind him, and trotted over the green ridge to the house known as Sedgcomb. A sheep-dog and a fox-terrier came rushing out to meet him, but he took no notice of them. When he had dismounted and they still leaped upon him, he silenced them with angry words. After stabling his horse he strode into the house.

‘What the deuce are you doing here?’ he exclaimed, in a surly tone, to an old man whom he found sitting over the kitchen-fire. ‘You are always sure to be where you are not wanted.’

‘*Pax vobiscum*, Saint Michael!’ was the giggling reply; little as latinity was to be expected from the speaker’s appearance. ‘As I have said before, “the ass knoweth his master’s crib, and the bird of the air his nest.”’

He spoke as one who stood in no fear of the other’s ill-humour; as one, too, who was fairly confident of his own power of restoring equanimity. He met Wayfer’s sullen looks with a grin peculiar to himself. From this first view of the old gentleman it would have been difficult to say off-hand to what class of the community he belonged. He was certainly no ordinary rustic. The highly coloured appearance of the centre of his small face was the only conjectural index to the prevailing habits of his life. He was slightly built, and had obviously never made his living at the tail of the plough. He wore cloth garments, his coat being of a rusty black except where it approached the neck; this part was

very nearly white. He hardly appeared reputable enough for a minister of any most unendowed denomination.

Wayfer soon showed signs that he had no intention of seriously resisting him; displayed chiefly in a dogged silence which followed a minute or two's further grumbling. He sat down to the meal which was laid ready for him on the kitchen-table, and kept his eye upon the plate with which he was engaged.

'Market flat, I s'pose?' hazarded the visitor, from his chair by the fire.

'Help yourself, and don't talk to me,' replied Wayfer, pushing the jug of beer an inch or two across the table.

The middle-aged woman who was engaged at another table brought forward a glass, and the elder was not slow in availing himself of the invitation. He carried his glass with him to the fire, and, after taking a draught, placed it upon the shelf-seat fixed in the large old-fashioned ingle by

the side of the cat which was curled up there.

It was not often that the young farmer kept up his ill-humour so long in the presence of Christopher Clinkscales. The latter knew well how far he might go, and was by no means deficient in tact. He knew that every Wayfer had a will of his own, and he was shrewd enough not to risk the loss of an acquaintance which had developed so satisfactorily since the death of this young man's father. He awaited contentedly the lifting of the clouds.

Whilst Wayfer is bringing himself to a more amiable frame of mind, with the help of another jug of beer and a second liberal allowance of cold mutton, we may look somewhat more closely at this nondescript visitor of his. The latter's eyes were still fixed upon the fire with an odd, half-vacant expression peculiar to them; their glistening, it may be mentioned, was due to an involuntary moisture, rather than to

any intellectual eagerness behind. His face, as I have said, was small, the greater part of it being covered by a heavy moustache blended with whiskers of the type generally designated mutton-chop: the chin and lower jaw were occasionally shaved. These two latter features, however, were so small that his face seemed to end with the overhanging moustache. His forehead was, comparatively, as insignificant as his chin, notwithstanding that the hair was receding towards the crown. All his hair was grey, and one could with safety fix his minimum age at three-score.

After looking once or twice fruitlessly towards his friend, he chuckled something to himself about the virtue of patience, and brought forth a newspaper from his pocket. He then adjusted a pair of old heavily-rimmed eye-glasses, and pretended to read by the light of the fire. His tactics were the best that could have been adopted. He had not been long engaged

over his paper before the heavy chair in which the young farmer had been sitting was thrust back noisily over the stone floor, and the man walked forward slowly towards the fire. Clinkscles made no alteration in his position, being still bent forward to get the firelight upon his paper. Of course, Wayfer was now irritated by his silence, and looked down at the man's head with knitted eyebrows. It was, then, simply a question of prevailing stubbornness.

‘Now, then,’ exclaimed Wayfer at last, displaying still further annoyance at being obliged to give in, ‘what do you want with me?’

‘Do you feel better?’ inquired Clinkscles, facetiously, looking up as he removed the glasses from his nose.

‘Stop your fooling, or else you’ll go. I’ll not put up with it to-night.’

‘I am quite agreeable. I didn’t begin it,’ was the reply. ‘But I’ll have a drop more beer, if there’s any in the jug,’ he

added, stepping to the table and pouring out what remained.

‘Care to see the *Reformer*?’

The paper was held out as Christopher sat down in his chair.

‘No, not now; you can leave it. I am going into the village, and I want you to come too.’

‘’St going to Giles’ singing-class?’ asked Clinkscales, with surprise, and not without a suspicion of scorn.

‘Singing-class,—no. But has he begun ’em again?’

‘To-night; so he told me. He asked me to go, but my liver’s weak. You might as well have a singing-class for the bulls of Bashan as for them of Shipcombe. That’s my opinion, and I ought to know something about it, too, for I made pianos for nigh ten years of my life, and heard Jenny Lind times. I’d never ought to have left London, for——’

‘Don’t begin that,’ said Wayfer, fearing

the topic from previous experience. 'Come along with me.'

Clinkscapes drank off the contents of his glass, and then took up his overcoat and hat from a chair. He grumbled audibly as he struggled into his coat, and with difficulty buttoned it, for the back part of the collar was turned inwards. Thus equipped, he followed Wayfer into the yard, tucking his hands into his sleeves for warmth as he went. They crossed the fields in the direction of the gate by which the farmer had recently entered.

'Now look here, Christopher,' the young man began, before they had gone many paces, 'you set up for being desperate wise. What can make a woman refuse a legacy?'

The question took the elder by surprise. His mind was not especially clear at this time of the evening, and it was difficult for him under such conditions to get his thoughts out of the groove into which

they had settled themselves. He was just now in the streets of London, where, as he said, he had spent the early years of his life, and in which, in imagination, he spent very much of his time now. There was such a complete incongruity between the question and the subject of his thoughts, that he was longer than usual in gathering his brains together. The inquiry had to be repeated before it elicited any reply.

‘Refuse a legacy? Let me see: never knew a case. It’s rather hard to imagine. But stop,—has *she* refused it?’

‘Yes,’ replied Wayfer, angrily. ‘She only went to the office to refuse it, so she said. When they made her take it, she gave it next minute to that—that—sister Riley. What’s got hold of the girl?’

‘Let me see,’ mused the philosopher. ‘That’s sing’lar . . . Religion, Michael,’ he added, in a moment, ‘that’s the bottom of the matter. It drives out all common sense: always keeps you back in the world.’

‘That’s why you are so low, isn’t it?’

‘Certainly. I was mad on religion in my young days, as I’ve often told you, and it’s paying me out now. You can never throw it off. I ain’t surprised at the girl doing it: not a bit.’

‘Come, if you’re drunk I don’t want to be bothered with you,’ said Wayfer, more seriously.

‘Drunk! Not much chance of it now-a-days,’ replied the other, sulkily, leaning against the gate at which they had stopped.

‘Well, then, do you know what should make her refuse it?’

‘It’s religion, I tell you. It’ll make you do anything.’

One of Mr. Clinkscapes’ fixed ideas was the baleful influence of what he called religion, and when in doubt as to the explanation of any piece of particularly foolish conduct he never failed to offer this as the solution.

‘Why, aren’t they allowed to take legacies?’

‘They are not allowed to do anything that will help ’em on in the world, and that’s a truism. But look here, Michael, my man, you needn’t fret about the legacy. You can’t get the girl, let alone the legacy. I’ve got news. They tell me as it’s a settled thing between her and young Bewglass. If it isn’t settled, it’s next door. I have that on good authority. No names.’

‘Her and the devil!’ exclaimed Wayfer, quickly opening the gate and nearly throwing down the little man.

‘Well, well; no personal assault, if you please. I s’ppose you’ll allow me an opinion. It’s a truism what I tell you.’

‘We’ll see about that,’ said Wayfer, when they were in the road. ‘I’ve sailed away fine enough until to-day.’

‘What if you have!’ growled Clinkscals. ‘I have this news on good authority, I tell you. Besides, if she’s thrown the legacy

away, what's the good of her to you? Do you think she'll do for a farmer's wife? ha! ha!

Clinkscapes did not laugh,—he never did laugh; his risible faculties were confined in expression to a chuckle or a snigger.

‘That's nothing to you,’ exclaimed Wayfer, in reply. ‘If I want her, that's enough. Where do you get this news? It's all a lie. Do you think a fellow like that would marry a school-missus?’

‘I never cook my eggs twice. I've told you, and you can do what you like with the news. A prophet never gets honour—’

The farmer did not hear the oracular conclusion: he turned away in wrath, and set off briskly down the lanes, followed by the grumbling Christopher. The latter had to take two steps to every one of the other's, and was then still about two paces behind. He did not care to be very far off, for the night was rapidly closing in, and if anything tried Mr. Clinkscapes'

nerves it was darkness in a high wind. He did not like the sound of swaying branches without being able to see their movements, and these easterly winds which usher-in November have the particular habit of making the most of such a sound. They do not sink with the day, like an honest blustering west, but keep up a pitiless chase through the darkest hours which precede the waning moon. Neither attempted to speak again until they came out by the village green. From here some window lights were visible, but very little else. The elder man grasped his companion's arm.

‘Where are you going to?’ he said.

‘To Giles’s: she’ll be there, won’t she?’

‘Joice ’ll be there an’ all, man.’

To this Wayfer made no response; he led the way on up the village. Most of the windows showed a light;—some through the blind; some from the uncertain blaze of a fire, over which could be seen a

labouring man with his pipe ; and two or three through the stock of petty wares which constituted a shop. They passed the part where windows were most plentiful, and then came a gap of about a hundred dark yards. Here Clinkscale ran against the wall, and audibly muttered an imprecation. Shortly after this, they reached a detached cottage, in the windows of which could be seen the shadow of a plant upon the blind. Wayfer stopped at the door, and heard within the sounds of a violin being tuned : in a moment he lifted the latch, and entered without ceremony, his companion following close upon his heels.

CHAPTER IV.

SOCIAL.

A TIN oil lamp stood alight upon the table, and before the fire, one at each end of the hearth-rug, sat an old man and a young woman. The former held a fiddle on his knee, and, as he raised his face to look towards the door when it was opened, he was easily recognizable as our acquaintance Giles Radway, the roadman. The girl, too, raised her eyes, but let them fall almost as soon as she had done so.

‘O, Michael, be that you?’ said Giles, in a cheery voice. ‘And Master Clinkscles an’ all. Come in, come in!’

‘Evening, Giles,’ remarked Christopher,

whose eyes were unpleasantly dazzled by the strong light upon entering: as he spoke, he wiped them with a red cotton pocket-handkerchief. ‘’Tis an uncommon dark night.’

‘’T be, Master Clinkscapes, evidently,’ replied Giles; ‘although I ha’n’t been out myself since dusk. Quite a gale, too, by the sound of it, however.’

‘I call it a ’urricane, and nothing short of it. I can’t abide a wind.’

‘So you’ve said afore, and yet there beunt much of you to stand in the way of it,’ observed Giles, with a good-natured smile.

‘’Taint quantity, Giles, but quality as is wanted in this world. That’s a truism *you* should bear in mind, Joice,’ said Clinkscapes, turning towards the young woman already mentioned, who was smiling at her father’s remark.

Christopher was quite favourable to facetiousness when not directed within any

distance of his own person. He always felt that Joice Radway did not treat him with sufficient respect.

‘You are expecting plenty, Giles,’ Wayfer said, looking at the chairs which were arranged round the table. ‘Your class must be looking up.’

‘The chairs be a-ready, Michael, for they as like to come,’ replied Radway, simply. ‘Mebbe they’ll be filled before the winter’s over. I don’t expect many to-night, of course, as it be the first.’

‘Does Miss Sulby come to ’em now?’ was Wayfer’s next inquiry.

Some difference seemed to have come over this young farmer since his entrance to Radway’s cottage. Alien to him as such a quality will no doubt be thought, there was a suspicion of sheepishness about him as he sat in this little room. As he put the above question, it looked very much as if he were fidgeting in his chair. He flattered himself that he had uttered his

words with the perfection of unconcern, and possibly he had done so: nevertheless, it drew the eyes of Joice from Mr. Clink-scales with whom she was talking to Michael himself. The movement was made quite naturally, and there was no particular expression on her face to show that the glance was anything but a casual one. Wayfer, however, felt her eyes upon him, of which perception his knitted eyebrows gave evidence.

‘No, Michael, her beunt a-coming this winter,’ replied Radway, with his eyes bent down upon his fiddle. ‘But Miss Silverside told me as it were not unlikely that she should come in sometimes.’

Then Giles struck a fiddle-string with his finger and tightened it. The pleasant face of the old man was to-night seen to advantage. He had a clean, bright-coloured complexion which a meagre grey beard set off well. His blue-grey eyes displayed considerable intelligence, and they were

often lit up with a twinkle of conscious humour rare in a face of pure rustic extraction. His nose was rather large and sharp, but noticeably well-shaped; his lips bore that look of unobtrusive serenity often to be observed in characters of a truly musical tendency. At times of complete repose his face might be caught touched with a suspicion of sadness, in all likelihood an unconscious reflection of no definitely perceived sensation. In honour of his visitors, Giles had to-night donned a brown jacket of thick warm material, otherwise his garb was that of a comfortable agricultural working-man.

The contrast between Radway and Clink-scales in this juxtaposition was striking and suggestive. The former was the elder by a few years, but in the matter of age the difference was not noticeable: the expression upon the respective faces was everything. One could have experienced no surprise at hearing that Christopher

had been in his day a bankrupt, and that he was now discontented with the world at large; nor could one have done so upon being told that Giles, poor as he had ever been, had never been known to owe a penny. This latter was not indeed invariably the case, but the exceptions to it had been short-lived and few. The first of them befell in his early life, when he had a sickly wife and family of small children on his hands, and he himself rendered helpless by an accident in the hay-field: when, live as frugally as conscientious poverty compelled him, the baker's bill was a matter of twelve shillings every Saturday. Upon this occasion alone had Giles been on the point of foundering, but he was saved by the human feeling of the baker himself. Giles could be often heard to tell the story even yet.

‘Never you mind, Giles,’ had said this magnanimous baker, when the customer had declared his inability to pay for an-

other loaf. 'Never you mind about the bill. You've been a good customer to I, and you shall not want the bread. Pay me when you can.'

The only other occasion of similar misfortune was but a few years later than the first one. It was then that Giles' cottage had been burned to the ground. It was his own unencumbered bit of freehold. Again it was his well-known integrity of character which stood by him. A subscription was raised among his well-to-do neighbours, promoted by Mr. Bewglass, the late vicar of the parish, and a goodly sum was raised for the re-building. Still, when all was done, and the new cottage erected, there remained a balance of some thirty pounds unprovided for. There seemed nothing for it but a mortgage, had not the builder stepped in with a neighbourly suggestion.

'Look here, Master Radway,' said this other considerate creditor, 'I know you

and you know I. I be in no hurry for the money. Let us spread it over three years. You can pay me ten pounds a year.'

These two glimpses of Giles' past history give us some idea of what we may call the material character of the man.

Mr. Christopher Clinkscapes was the direct opposite of all this. Creditors were not hasty to trust him, having, it is to be supposed, found him not to have been cast in a particularly honest mould. His appearance, as has been said, bespoke it. It pronounced, in unmistakable accents, unreality, insubstantiality, as plainly as ever did stuccoed house-front in want of repair. Clinkscapes had been born and bred in the town.

One may hardly draw a general deduction from the contrast in these two men, temptingly as it thrusts itself upon the attention. All town life is by no means a simulacrum, any more than all country life is a solid reality. Nevertheless, the balance

would seem to be in favour of the country, if we mean by this term absolute rusticity. The offspring of a town life in the mass, even to a higher level than some might feel disposed to admit, is at best a caricature of something higher,—a caricature of the civilisation of the time. The offspring of a rural life is at no time such a caricature; always of itself a reality. It becomes daily more difficult to draw this distinction between the two phases, but it is happily still far from impossible. The town-bred vulgar is so contemptibly short of what he would appear to be: the basest and most sordid rustic *is*, on the other hand, actually what he appears to be. To clinch the matter in a couple of figurative words: the town speaks an anomalous cockney jargon; the country speaks a historical dialect, let it be as rude as you please.

Christopher Clinkscales, then, was a specimen of this caricature of civilized

life. Such a specimen is to be seen hanging about many of our most remote villages in these days ; generally, of course, about the spittoons in the tap-room of the public-house. Their means of livelihood are always more or less a mystery. They are kin to somebody in the neighbourhood, and possibly sponge upon the relationship. All are not so fortunate as our friend Clinkscapes. More was known of him than is known of the majority of his class.

It was nearly thirty years ago since he had seen the delightful opportunity of snatching to himself a livelihood without any need thenceforth of unpleasant exertion on his own part. He was not the man to let such a tide escape him. He had come to Shipcombe to marry a cousin of his, and he had married her. It could not be asserted positively that he had done an honest day's work since. It is needless to add that the attractive cousin

possessed the bulk of her father's savings ; a small investment which produced enough to support a simple household in a small village. If Clinkscapes was ever directly tasked with his mercenary conduct, he cited in defence the example of Elijah, who, in the day of his necessity, was ordered to Zarephath to be sustained by a widow woman there.

With the majority in the village Clinkscapes was undoubtedly a favourite. He had acquired amongst his neighbours a remarkable reputation for wisdom, and possibly on this account he had received the honorary designation of The Mayor. Over many he exercised a very marked influence, more especially, of course, over the younger members of the community. There is nothing strange in this. A man of discontent is not now without disciples in any parish in the land. Most people crave for discontent. It is the business of this Clinkscapes species to dispense it, and

this particular specimen did his duty well.

Michael Wayfer was his most important convert. Since the death of Michael's father quite an intimate friendship had developed between the two. The young farmer had caught some of the infection of the time, and he enjoyed the cheap rant with which Clinkscapes regaled him upon what we now call socialism, and radicalism generally. The advanced journals which Christopher received from a London friend were eagerly devoured by his disciples in the village, and the principles which they inculcated were duly digested,—digested, at least, so far as the personal requirements of each consumer demanded. Ludicrous enough were the results of it in many cases.

Giles Radway, possibly because he was proof against these revolutionary doctrines, came in with many others for a good share of Mr. Clinkscapes' contempt. The roadman was seen to be of a distinctly lower

order,—a mere rustic viewing life from the standpoint of the parish of Shipcombe. The attitude of Giles was not calculated to better his position in the opinion of this philosopher. It was one of natural humility and complete unconsciousness of self. He paid a kind of deference to his learned neighbour, seldom presumed to enter into an argument with him, however strongly opposed to the sentiments he expressed, unless it were upon any point of religion. Nobody was more impressed with the inferiority of his own talents. He had never formed to himself a conscious theory of life. Any good work in which he engaged was merely the outcome of instinctive impulse.

This singing-class, for instance, which was to have a commencement in his cottage to-night, was a good illustration of his general attitude. It was a relic of his former life. The class had, in fact, only been revived the previous winter after a

break of thirty years (at the instance, it should be mentioned, of Miss Sulby the school-mistress), and the reception which it had then met with had encouraged the old man to make the trial another year. It was quite a voluntary undertaking for the rational amusement of those who cared to avail themselves of it. It formed no part of a devised social scheme in Giles Radway, whatever may have been the school-mistress' thoughts with regard to it. Several of the young men and women of the village gladly took part in the gathering, whilst a few of the elders also attended, both young and old being, no doubt, attracted more by the allurements of an informal social meeting than by any enthusiasm for the music itself. As Radway has already intimated, the class was this year to have the support of Miss Silverside, the vicar's daughter.

Whilst we have been making this examination of the two most noticeable

members of the company, several others have taken places amongst them. The two or three ungainly youths, who came in with half-suppressed giggles as they pushed each other forward, kept together in a corner enjoying a little fooling on their own account. A tall old rustic stood by Giles's chair, taking a part in the conversation which Clinkscapes was promoting; this was Peter Rule, head carter to Mr. Kimble. Nathan Bench, a fellow musician—the clarionet was his forte—and old Benjamin Hazard, the hedger, a thin-faced old man, who stooped very much, were also near to Giles. Wayfer, too, still sat there, but apparently in a state of dissatisfaction. He took but little part in the conversation. Joice Radway, once or twice, addressed herself especially to him, assuming as she did so an air of familiarity; but Michael's attitude repelled her.

‘Well, Giles,’ Mr. Clinkscapes was remarking, ‘you won’t alter my opinion. It’s

a waste of time. 'Twas all very well in your day, when the country was asleep, to fiddle away and to pretend to sing, but it won't do now. You ought to turn this class into a club for discussing social principles; that's what we want now-a-days.'

'I don't understand anything about they, Master Clinkscapes,' replied Radway. 'I was always quite a home-spun man, and I belong to the old system. Of course, things be a deal altered from what they were; but I can't see how music be a waste of time even in these days. I think we should be better off if we had more of it.'

'Ye be right an' all, Giles,' chimed in Nathan Bench. 'Us wants making more joysome, I believe, and I dwunt know nothing as ull do it better than music. It beunt no good a-going down to the 'Arrow and having the drink, for ye dunt get no joy out of it, and ye lose your money an' all. As for your social princi-

ples, Master Clinkscapes, I dunt see as 'em do ye much good at last.'

'Noa,' assented Peter Rule, with a head shake. 'I be of your opinion, Nathan.'

'It's no matter what people like you think,' asserted Clinkscapes. 'You've no intellects; you don't know what you want. If I had the management of you, I'd——'

Mr. Clinkscapes' harangue was cut short by a knock upon the outer door, and the consequent whisper of 'Miss Silverside' which passed amongst the assembly. Joice immediately rose from her chair and went to the door.

It proved to be the young lady whose name was just mentioned, the pleasant sound of her voice preceding her into the room. As she entered, all present rose, (including even the revolutionary mayor,) and remained standing in bashful attitudes. There were more present than the lady had expected to see, and the rich colour which the wind had brought into

her cheeks for a moment overspread her face. She shook hands with Giles Radway, and passed a general greeting to the rest of the assembly. All then rearranged themselves, one at least of the company noticing that Michael Wayfer had taken a seat by the door.

The chief musician and the vicar's daughter entered into a preliminary conversation. Miss Silverside had not been present at these meetings before, and Giles had particular delight in talking to her about them. No less had she in listening to him, for she enjoyed his rustic tongue as much as the matter of his conversation. She saw a reflection of his natural surroundings in it, just as much as in other natural country sounds. His tones seemed to suggest orchards and green pastures, where the apples lazily ripen and the sheep lazily nibble, undisturbed by any of the anxieties of artificial life.

‘It were a custom of my father’s, Miss

Silverside, very many years ago. Our family were always quite hands for music up to my great-granfer's time; quite a gift at it. He've told me times—he always took a vast of pleasure in talking of bygone times, poor man,—he've told me times that in his young days, up to the time of his marriage, in fact, the instruments of the Shipcombe choir were all played by they of his own family. He played the violin himself, and he played it well, that he did; his eldest brother, that were my Uncle Willum, played the clarionet; his father played the flute, and his granfer the bass viol. Then a number of them sang in the choir, of course; and they were capital hands in the belfry 'an' all. The same family could ring a touch of St. Dunstan's doubles ten six scores in something under forty minutes, which was thought to be good work at that day.'

'I should think so,' replied the young lady. 'It is something to be proud of.'

‘Twere just their bias, you see, miss. Of course, different folks have different likings.’

‘Of course; but it is a pity that everybody has not a taste for music.’

‘I agree with you, miss, in that respect,’ replied Radway; ‘but I must ask you to excuse me, for I be a-wasting your time and my own with my long-legged tale. However, you were kind enough to say something to me in the road this morning concerning these classes, and of course, as we be but plain, home-spun folk, we shall be indebted to you——’

‘No, no, Mr. Radway,’ the young lady hastened to interpose. ‘I wish you to let me come just like one of the rest, and to be entirely under your direction. I shall not be presumptuous enough to say anything whatever about the class.’

‘That be kind of you, however,’ said Giles. ‘In that case, then, of course, we’ll

do the same as we did last year,' he added, looking round at those assembled.

'You were saying, Mr. Radway, that you had thought of taking some of the songs from Shakespeare for this winter's practice.'

'I had thought, as you say, miss, of trying first some of the settings of Shakespeare's songs. There be some grand things amongst 'em. I have an old book here which contains quite a collection of the best, and I'll copy out——'

'But you needn't do that,' said Miss Silverside. 'There are several of them in Novello's cheap series of part songs, only three-half-pence each, and I shall be glad to give you what copies you want, if you will allow me.'

Giles raised his eyebrows and looked with delight into the young lady's face as he replied,

'Well, to be sure! I can never thank you, miss, for this kindness, however.'

‘I should think that would be better. But what collection is this, Mr. Radway?’

The old man moved with alacrity to Miss Silverside’s chair and leaned down to display the book. They became absorbed in it for a minute or two, examining with interest the title page and date, the flourishing dedication and other points of the old music-book.

Whilst the conversation had been going on between Giles and the young lady, the rest of the company had got gradually more at their ease, and they were now venturing to indulge in a little by-conversation amongst themselves. Michael Wayfer displayed anything but interest in the subject of the consultation, and was beginning to show very decided discontent with his position. As soon as Giles had moved across to Miss Silverside, the young farmer glanced around him, giving a particularly stealthy look when his eyes fell upon Joice Radway. He saw that she

was apparently engaged with what was going on between her father and the young lady.

Wayfer was perhaps as unmusical as any human being can be; and he made no pretence, either to himself or to anybody else, of having come here out of interest in the fiddling proceedings. His state of mind was generally understood, for it was well known that he had another object of interest in the neighbourhood of Giles's hearth, although it was true he had displayed very little of such interest upon this occasion. That some sort of correspondence of a tacit kind had taken place between him and Joice Radway we have already remarked. Engaged as Joice was with the remarks of Miss Silverside, she was far from unobservant even now of the actions of young Wayfer. It did not cause her any great surprise when she next looked in the direction of the door to see that the chair was empty which he had

until this moment occupied. Directly she had perceived it, she heard the outer door of the cottage closed, as it seemed with intentional quietness.

Joice took no time to consider, but instantly followed him. Miss Silverside and the old man were still busy with the book; the rest of the company were engaged in conversation. Joice reached the door with but a whisper from some facetious one. The wind just piped through the doorway, and Joice had left the house.

Giles would gladly have lengthened out indefinitely this general conversation, but the young lady had too much politeness to allow it. The recent movements had aroused her, and she feared that they were the result of impatience in those present. By way of relieving them of tedium she suggested that they should get to something practical, and asked Radway for a tune. This the old man very readily gave, breaking with surprising gusto into the

lively strains of the 'Blue Bells of Scotland.' Whilst he was still playing, his daughter returned to her place, and there presently followed some of the part songs which had been learned by the singers during the previous winter. All were invigorated by the exertion, and for rather more than an hour afterwards did they keep up the entertainment.

Giles Radway had seldom felt such a glow of enthusiastic enjoyment as when he returned with his lantern from having lighted Miss Silverside up the road to the vicarage.

'Quite a deep knowledge o' music, Joice,' he said later to his inattentive daughter; 'quite so. Her knew the old editions well, too. Mr. Gabriel Bewglass was right after all. For a young lady of these days quite out of the ordinary.'

But Joice could not share in his enthusiasm: her thoughts were too fully engaged in another direction.

CHAPTER V.

THE SCHOOL-MISTRESS.

JOICE had not yet learned how to deal with a man in ill-humour,—I mean how not to deal with him at all. It is a lesson which the best of women are particularly slow in learning. The want of tact in this instance was, of course, excusable enough, for few women could have had less experience in the complicated humours of men than this daughter of Giles Radway. She had brothers, it is true, but she had never lived in intimacy with them. Both of them were very much older than she, and they had left the paternal roof when she was quite a little girl. They did not

now live in the same village with her. Nor had Joice ever been given to keeping company with young men, like the majority of girls in her station of life. There was a staidness in her behaviour which had always kept her very much alone, for seriousness is as hard to mate in Joice Radway's position in life as it is in positions somewhat higher.

From her father, then, must she have learned what she knew of men's humours, and it is not thus surprising that she had learned so little of them. During the whole course of her life, since at least her earliest childhood, the tenor of things under the old man's roof had been so exceptionally placid, that humours, good or bad, had scarce had place amongst them. The training was, perhaps, unfortunate for Joice, seeing that fate was to throw her in the way of such an incarnation of humours as Michael Wayfer.

The footing between these two was some-

what ill-defined, the understanding which did unmistakably exist being merely a tacit one. It had been growing steadily for a space of two or three years, but had reached no climax. Naturally Joice could but conjecture, with her neighbours, that it was Michael's intention to make her his wife some day. Her ignorance upon this point was for the most part unconscious, for until within the last two weeks no shadow of uncertainty had ever approached her. The subject had never assumed the interrogative form in her mind. She felt supremely happy in the quiet course of things,—for of her own mind she had long been accurately informed,—and had not asked, or even thought, of anything further, except in the most vague and distant manner. Now, however, the question had confronted her, and it stood an ugly reality in her path. The sudden appearance of it did not exactly daunt her, but inspired her rather with a reckless determination

to attack it. Some vague feeling of hope was in her that, as she dashed against it, it would vanish and prove to have been but an empty apparition. It was with this feeling that she had pursued Wayfer from the room, when she discovered he had left it. She could bear the torture no longer.

When she had closed the cottage door behind her, Joice stood in Tartarean darkness—darkness made absolute. It was not the mere gloom of an ordinary dark night, when cloud ridges can be dimly seen, and trees and other objects look black against them. This was blackness itself—without form and void. The rays of light which shot from the doorway seemed positively to cleave a way through it, leaving walls of solid murk on either side. It made the girl hesitate. Hopeless it seemed to trace anybody for a couple of yards through this. But likewise had it made young Wayfer hesitate, and the thought

of this suddenly crossed the girl's mind. She called his name aloud.

There was no reply. The bare branches of the tree beside the cottage swayed before the wind, and the noise might have made it difficult for him to hear a human voice. She called again, still louder than before.

‘Is that you, Joice?’ came in reply from a point quite near to her.

‘Yes, Michael, let me speak to you.’

He took a couple of steps, and, in stretching out his hand before him, touched her. He at once drew it back.

‘Why are you so unkind to me to-night?’ she said, just touching his arm as she did so.

‘Unkind to you! Why, what have I done? I have not spoken a single word to you since I came.’

‘No, you have not: I wish you had. Do you want to give me up?’

‘Why should I want to give you up?’

‘You seem to have been different for the last few weeks, so I thought you were tired of me.’

‘Pooh!’ exclaimed the other, impatiently. ‘Do you think a man wants to give you up if he doesn’t talk rubbish to you all day long? A nice life you want to lead us if you think that. Where would business go to?’

‘No, I don’t want you to do that: but there is a difference between that and never speaking to me at all, except a few angry words. You didn’t use to be like this.’

‘Didn’t use to be like this! Of course not. Isn’t my father dead? And haven’t I got all the farm to look after on my own account? And doesn’t everything go as wrong as it can?’

‘But you used to tell me when you were bothered with things, and were glad to get away and talk with me, so you said.’

Poor Joice seemed doomed to make

matters worse. Fancy a slighted mistress reminding the vacillating lover of past tenderness, and by way of appeasing ill-humour too !

‘ You’re enough to make anybody swear,’ exclaimed Michael, taking two or three wrathful strides through the darkness. ‘ You go in, Joice,’ he said, when he had come up to her again, ‘ and leave me alone. I must get home.’

‘ Won’t you have a lantern ? you can never find your way in this darkness.’

She said this after he had pretended to kiss her ; but he only muttered a ‘ No,’ and left her standing there. He stopped in the road before he had gone far and waited to see her re-enter the house. When the door was again closed, he walked slowly on, not in the direction of his own home.

The school-house was at the extreme end of the village, some little distance beyond Giles Radway’s cottage. It was towards

this part that Wayfer was now going. He kept, so far as he could judge, to the middle of the roadway. He had passed the vicarage, which was on the opposite side to Giles's, only perceptible by means of the light above the doorway, and he was now peering through the darkness on the other hand. It was necessary to proceed cautiously, holding his hands out at full length before him, so as to receive timely notice of the wall. Presently he came in contact with the railings. These railings enclosed a square yard which stood between the school itself and the mistress's residence. From here he could see a light in the window of the former which surprised him; he paused there to consider.

Wayfer tried to keep up a feeling of boldness over this errand which he had taken in hand. It was by no means an easy matter for him, for Miss Sulby, though scrupulously polite, had never disguised the attitude which she meant to assume

towards anything like advances from him. It was true he had the exceptional support to-night of a strong feeling of the disinterestedness of this particular mission. He came as one of the executors of the late Mr. Jonathan Wayfer, to discuss business matters with an injured legatee. This he required to keep clearly before him. The position was not, indeed, exactly a false one. He did feel the gross treatment to which Ruth had been subjected, and he was fully prepared to take any steps within his power for redressing the wrong which had been done to her. If the doing so should in any way advance him in the school-mistress's regard, then he was by no means averse from benefiting by the advantage. His slow progress in this respect was to-night an especially irritating consideration to him. Possibly that piece of news which Clinkscales had entrusted to him on the road was, in some measure, the cause of it.

As the thought recurred to him now, he pulled at the iron gate upon which his hand lay and found it was locked. Miss Sulby occupied her cottage alone, an arrangement which had possibly strengthened the executor in his business. It was also, however, the cause of this very inconvenient arrangement of the gate. The cottage and school stood at right angles to the road, and the doors to both opened upon the yard within the railings. This was the only approach. He shook the gate again, more violently than before.

This time the action did not pass unobserved, for the sound of a dog's bark came from within the school. This sound and the light gave unmistakable evidence of the mistress' being in there, and not in the habitable portion. For what purpose Wayfer did not pretend to conjecture. His only fear was that she would not be alone. The dog barked furiously for some seconds, and then lowered its voice into a

growl. Presumably this was in response to somebody's commands. Presently it barked again, the sound this time coming evidently from just behind the door. Wayfer could now hear Ruth's voice speaking to the dog. At once he tried the gate again, with the result of infuriating the animal within.

Miss Sulby, too, had heard the sound, and the key was turned in the lock. As she opened the door a little way the dog struggled in her arms, and made it impossible for anything to be heard. She succeeded in silencing him at last, or at any rate in making his uproar intermittent, and she heard the voice which addressed her.

‘Who is it?’ cried Ruth, in reply.

‘Michael Wayfer.’

‘I cannot speak to you now,’ she said, opening the door a little wider.

‘It is only about the legacy,’ he hastened to assert. ‘I am not going to see you wronged.’

‘Do not trouble about me. Nobody has done me any wrong.’

‘But I think they have, and I’m not going to see it done. The money is yours by rights, and the woman’s as good as stole it. Let us have a little talk about it.’

‘I cannot talk to you to-night. I do not wish to talk to anybody about it. I did not want the money.’

‘But it was yours. Nobody has a right to frighten you out of it.’

‘Frighten me out of it!’ exclaimed Ruth, with some addition which sounded like a laugh. ‘Do you think I gave it her from fear? Think no more about it, Mr. Wayfer.’

‘Why should you throw two hundred pounds away? There’s something at the bottom of it. You might as well tell me your reason, for I can help you to get it back for all you think so lightly of me. I know how to manage that lot.’

‘I must not stand here in the cold,’ was

Miss Sulby's final answer to him. 'I tell you truly that I have no reason to give. I simply did not want the money, and never had a thought of taking it since I first knew it had been left to me. If you really wish to be kind to me, you will believe what I say, and never speak another word to me about it.'

'Very well then, I will,' said Wayfer, changing the tone in which he spoke. 'I only wanted to be kind to you from the first, and I hope you'll think none the worse of me for it. I'll do nothing that you don't want me to do. Good-night.'

'Good-night,' came from the narrow opening in the doorway, and Ruth again locked herself in the solitary school-room. It was some minutes before the young farmer left his position by the railings.

Miss Sulby returned to her work in which she had been interrupted. The school-room in which she was engaged was,

in the main, like other parish school-rooms. There were rows of desks and benches, a black-board in one corner, a harmonium in another, a bare, dusty floor, and so forth ; and yet the impression which the place made was not that of bare discomfort, of arid principia distastefully obtruded, but savoured somewhat of the amenities of a cultivated dwelling. There were maps and simple views of Eastern customs, to be sure, upon the walls, but there were other things besides. Good plates of birds and animals were arranged in suitable places ; large views and various woodcuts also, taken from the best illustrated papers. On the mantel-piece, instead of only dust and a few pieces of half-used chalk, were vases of wild flowers (fresh ones, gathered in this month of November) and grasses, dry from the summer, but still hanging in all their pristine gracefulness. On brackets against the walls, at equal intervals around the room, was a series of busts, in plaster-of-

Paris, of typical heroes in various departments of life: literary, theological, military, and the rest. Room was found even for further embellishment, and it was upon this that the school-mistress was at present engaged.

Upon a newspaper, laid open on one of the desks, was a motley heap of leaves. To these had Ruth returned after her colloquy with her visitor. Upon a closer examination, the leaves proved to be dry, but they still had the beauty of autumn colouring; they had been pressed by the zealous school-mistress for their present purpose. As she disturbed the heap to select what she wanted for a suitable arrangement, its full splendour was revealed. Even the poor lamp-light could not deprive it of its glory. When Miss Sulby chose a particularly fine specimen, she regarded it more closely, and perhaps passed some compliment upon it aloud. The variety of

the leaves seemed infinite, alike in colour and shape. From the golden palmate chestnut to the golden willow slip, what a marvellous array ! The russet bracken was there, the pale ash, and the blushing rowan ; the precious coins from the beech-twigs which had again scattered their hoards to the winds ; the yellow, delicately-lobed maple, and her bigger, sharp-pointed brother, the sycamore, variegated with his curious autumn blotches ; the wild geraniums, blushing to the very heart ; bramble sprays, most variable of all, from lightest gold, through crimson and olive-green, to black. All these and many more were there : all gathered and pressed by the school-mistress for her scholars. She had been busily arranging them about the room at the time of the interruption.

The interview with Wayfer had disturbed the current of her thoughts. She was leaning over and handling the leaves,

but obviously with no definite purpose. It was a few minutes before she was able to proceed with her occupation.

The dog had again curled himself up on the little worn hearth-rug before the empty grate. When at last his mistress passed him in the course of her resumed work, her eye caught that of the faithful terrier, who was wrinkling his brow to look up at her as he tucked his nose in the joint of a back leg. He asked, as plainly as intelligent eye could ask, for a word of approval, and he saw that his mistress understood him. His wagging tail knocked upon the floor before the words were uttered which were already on her tongue.

‘ Good old Dash,’ she said, leaning down to stroke his smooth brow; ‘ you’ll take care of mistress, won’t you? you’ll keep the robbers away.’

After this brief interchange of kindly sentiments, Dash was allowed to fall off into a doze, whilst Ruth continued to be

busy with her occupation. For about half-an-hour longer she stayed there, and then her work was done. After giving a final survey to the room, she shrugged her shoulders from cold, and then put a light to her lantern. The other lamp was extinguished, and Miss Sulby crossed over to her dwelling.

Here too was loneliness ; but decidedly an air of homely comfort, so far as material adjuncts were concerned. When the lamp had been lighted, and the fire stirred, Ruth sat down upon a chair which stood beside the table, and rested her forehead on her hand. Some books lay open upon the table with the appearance of having been recently left, and upon them the young woman's eyes were fixed. Whether she was thinking about them or not, could not be definitely stated : in all probability not. The fit of meditation did not last long ; with a sudden determined movement, her chair was pulled in to the table,

and she became unmistakably engaged with the books before her.

The school-mistress was extremely methodical, as was no doubt necessary to one of her profession ; her strictness, however, was applied as firmly to her own habits as to those of the children with whom she had to deal. All her leisure time was duly apportioned amongst the various subjects which she herself wished to pursue, and to-night she was devoting to her French reading. She was as yet but a student in the language, and the manuscript vocabulary which she made as she went along was open beside the dictionary. The book was George Sand's 'François le Champi.'

In addition to the general air of comfort about this room, there was in it an unmistakable reflection of the simple refinement of the occupier's tastes. The mere furniture was plain enough, but not ugly. It is not, however, these substantial items which give character to a room. Horse-

hair and morocco give but a peep into the pocket, which is not an infallible index of intellectual distinctions. With the same materials to work upon, various hands produce very various results. As we have seen Miss Sulby's school-room, we will also examine her private sitting-room in some detail.

Against the wall by the door was a piano with a piece of music open upon it. On the top were two cabinet portraits in standing frames,—one, that of a clergyman not generally known; and the other that of a more distinguished contemporary, John Ruskin. The picture on the wall above was Holman Hunt's, 'The Light of the World.'

Above the sofa was a hanging book-case of four shelves, containing the school-mistress's private library, with a picture upon each side. The collection of books was a miscellaneous one, but was noticeable because of its including so many of

the classical *belles lettres*, in addition to the merely professional works. The geographies, arithmetics, and such books were relegated to the top shelf. The theological, or, more strictly speaking, devotional works occupied the second, including amongst them the 'Imitatio,' some volumes of Baring-Gould's 'Lives of the Saints,' together with sundry volumes of present-day High Church sermons and prayer-books. The two lower shelves were filled with general literature and historical works, most of them in the cheap reprinted editions so abundant since the opening of the present decade. Ranged amongst these latter must be noticed two or three of Ruskin's ethical works, amongst them 'Sesame and Lilies,' and 'Ethics of the Dust.'

The mantel-piece was adorned with a vase at each end, from which rose bunches of wild grasses about two feet high, bending gracefully in their natural positions.

In the centre was a timepiece, and around it little vessels containing wild-flowers, dried leaves, everlasting flowers, in addition to a couple of brass candlesticks. The picture hanging above was a large photograph, in an Oxford frame, of Gloucester Cathedral, that city being the place of Miss Sulby's birth. In the wall on each side of the fireplace was a store-cupboard reaching from ceiling to floor. Upon a stand before the window were some ordinary pot-flowers.

Such was the room in which Miss Sulby was now sitting in the light of a white-shaded oil-lamp. The wind was still audible without, but only some movement in the fire, the rustling of the pages of the dictionary, or a sigh of satisfaction from the dog as he rearranged himself upon the hearth-rug, broke the silence within the room. If at any moment the student became conscious of the silence, she would read out the translation aloud by way of

keeping her attention more closely upon it.

Thus for an hour did Ruth continue to work. It was half-past eight when she again rose from her chair. This time the books were put in their places upon the shelf, and the student took up a candle from a corner table. With this alight she went into the little room which was her kitchen, and got the things she wanted for her supper. The meal promised to be frugal enough. Two slices of bread and butter were put upon a plate, and she was now pouring out a glassful of milk from a basin. These things she carried on a tray to her parlour, and settled herself again before the fire. The dog had opened his eyes at the sound of movements, but had considered himself most comfortable where he was. He showed no expectation of sharing in the meal, although it was impossible for him to repress that mournful glance of self-restraint. Upon principle,

Ruth was blind to it. She sat with her feet towards the fender and partook of her meal with a book open in her hand.

This may have seemed carrying her discipline too far, but the occasion was exceptional. The action of Wayfer still clung about her, and threatened a fit of idle meditation. Such the school-mistress always strenuously resisted, and her most effective weapon was a book. This individual book had been taken from the second shelf of her book-case, and with it she was engaged for upwards of an hour. When the hands of the clock were nearing the hour of ten, it was replaced upon the shelf, and the candle was again brought forward.

The dog needed no summons of the voice. As soon as his mistress had taken a match from the box, the animal raised his head and looked towards her with a significant expression. He then got slowly to his legs, after which he simul-

taneously stretched himself and yawned. Finally, he stood with his fore-feet upon the rim of the fender and his nose in close proximity to the bars of the grate. Whilst Ruth drew the bolt of the door for the night, she said 'Come, Dash !' and the dog pattered slowly to her side. The next moment he was curled up in a circular basket at the foot of the stairs, and his mistress went in to extinguish the lamp. With a sigh, the dog heard the door closed upstairs, and all was quiet for the night.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAYOR'S LEVEE.

FOR some days Michael Wayfer was greatly unsettled. It is a fact that he was going through a slight attack of sentimental disturbance; it was not to be supposed that, in a nature such as his, the essential disease would go very deep or would be of very long continuance. He was born for a practical man, but even such men seldom wholly escape the infection incident to this period of life. There were one or two adventitious attributes certainly in Michael's case which served to distinguish it from a normal attack, and which served, moreover, to aggravate the disorder in a considerable degree.

Wayfer was of himself drawn towards Miss Ruth Sulby from some cause or other; but he was drawn towards her with additional intensity since his friend Clink-scales had informed him of the sympathy existing between that young lady and Mr. Gabriel Bewglass. It is an insignificant fact, and one in no way directly affecting this narrative, but one which may nevertheless be casually mentioned here, that 'the news' which Clink-scales had confided to his friend upon this matter rested upon no better authority than that of the Mayor himself. The statement was, moreover, made from mere conjecture and had no foundation in fact. It had been hazarded by Clink-scales as an innocent fiction, calculated to rid his friend's mind of a topic which was becoming annoying. So far from this being the result, the disclosure had, as has been said, only intensified Wayfer's feelings in the matter.

Prior to this, he was conscious of a grow-

ing antipathy towards young Bewglass. There seemed little ground for it, for the late vicar's son was an admittedly inoffensive being personally, and between him and Michael Wayfer there had been positively no intercourse whatever. The only occasion upon which there had been any approach to it was at the time of the death of the latter's father, when, as we know, Michael had himself fetched Bewglass to receive the dying man's disclosure. It must have been in connection with this that the feeling had arisen, for before his father's death Wayfer had no suspicion of dislike towards this man of whom he knew so little.

Whatever the cause, Wayfer felt really embittered at the supposed news of the footing between Bewglass and Miss Sulby, and was by it confirmed in a violent personal antipathy towards the former. He was not without a suspicion of the utter hopelessness of his own addresses to the

school-mistress, and this was not without its effect upon his feelings just mentioned ; nevertheless, he was resolved to sustain his pursuit of the lady with redoubled pertinacity. It would require something substantial to turn him from a course upon which he had thus decided, for he was endowed with a remarkable degree of stubbornness and impetuosity.

The mental disturbance arising from these considerations seriously hindered him in his business. The keen interest with which he usually devoted himself to agricultural traffic very noticeably abated, if it did not temporarily disappear altogether. He knew that for a year or two his father had lost money on his farm, and, now that affairs were finally settled, he knew what a small capital he had at his back ; nevertheless, he neglected the occupations by which alone he knew he could keep himself afloat ; and abandoned his mind to these empty considerations of

which we have been speaking. In his recklessness he did not take seriously to drinking, as possibly a weaker nature might have done ; still he undoubtedly drank more than he had been previously in the habit of doing. He seldom passed the door of the ' Harrow Inn ' whenever in its neighbourhood. This tendency, at least, met with the entire approval of his friend Christopher Clinkscales.

One morning, feeling the disquiet especially upon him, he left Sedgecomb with the definite object of going down to the inn. He knew that at any rate Clinkscales would be there, and this old toper had a great fascination for him. Wayfer cared for the company of nobody else in the village, and, moreover, he persuaded himself that there was no other company there worth having. He thought highly of the sagacity of his loquacious friend, and paid more heed to the advice which he tendered than perhaps the adviser him-

self was aware. This topic of the young farmer's attitude to the school-mistress was about the only one upon which they quarrelled, and that one was, as a rule, avoided between them. They had much else to occupy their attention.

Mr. Clinkscales was, as Wayfer expected, in the bar of the 'Harrow Inn ;' it was the only place where he could with any satisfaction pass the solid day. That atmosphere of beer and stale tobacco smoke was as necessary for his lungs as the liquor itself was for other organs. Moreover, it was to be had for nothing, which was in these days an important consideration.

Christopher's financial position was not a flourishing one, as we are already well aware. Yet it was vastly more satisfactory than that of multitudes of his betters. For his dinner he had to give no thought ; in itself a position which placed him far above the majority of mankind. Household affairs, as he always said, he left to

his wife ; and the providing for dinner, rent, and other such trivial outgoings, was included in this general announcement. In fact, the only point at which this man condescended to come in contact with economics at all was over the daily expenditure of a certain sum of threepence. This would not seem to offer any insuperable difficulties of calculation, seeing, as I have said, that it had not to concern itself with any of the common-place necessities of daily sustenance. But to Christopher it was capital, and as such it brought with it all the harassing perplexities of advantageous speculation. The insignificant sum of threepence had, in short, to provide its owner with liquor for the day, and it required the shrewdest calculation to wring from it anything like an appreciable quantity. Few could have stretched it as far as Mr. Clinkscapes.

This daily threepence was an institution of long standing, being an allowance from

his wife out of her separate estate. Since some unfortunate business speculations, in which the ruin of his house was threatened, he himself was content to limit his ambition to the judicious outlay of this modest sum. The bankruptcy had meant very little to him, for he himself was from the outset penniless, and his wife had rescued from it the bulk of her separate property. This still afforded them a certain income of some fifteen shillings a week, which Mrs. Clinkscles supplemented by the profits of a petty shop.

It will be seen, then, that the grey mare was here by far the better horse, and she was by no means beneath making the most of her position. Every morning after breakfast was the same ceremony gone through, as it had been now for more than twenty years. It had originated, no doubt, in a scheme for humbling Mr. Clinkscles, but there was nothing whatever to show that it had ever wrought such an effect

upon him. There was the same jingling of the keys as the cupboard drawer was opened, then the same dull chinking of the pence.

Mrs. Clinkscales would as soon have thought of giving it him in a silver piece as she would have thought of giving it him in gold. It was always in the dirtiest form available consistent with legal tender. Every night were the contents of her till examined, and the greenest, greasiest, most disreputable of pence consigned to that remarkable collection in the cupboard drawer. Then they were always presented to him with the same deliberative insult. One was placed upon his right hand, one upon his left, whilst the third was put in front, forming an equilateral triangle with the others. The good man never took them up at once, but nodded his head in recognition, with a 'Thank you, my dear,' addressed to the copper at the apex. His wife's remark had of late years dissolved into a look.

Some men might have found the position humiliating, but not so Mr. Clink-scales. Possibly his rude sense of humour may have helped him to pass it over. It is certain that there was a slight wrinkling beside the eyes as he gathered up his coppers and conveyed them to his pocket. He accepted his position with the supremest magnanimity.

From the sarcasm of his wife he would go in excellent humour to the inn, and there he would light his pipe. He generally had the morning hours alone, unless by chance a tramp came in in passing. He could not call for ale at once, so he made the most of the atmosphere. He had as usual this morning snuggled in the fire corner of the settle, with the last Saturday's paper in his hand. It was dirty and limp from general use, with signs of cracking about the creases. Clink-scales himself had handled it for five days, and was not now likely to find anything fresh in it

However, he had little choice of occupation.

‘Oh, only you, Mr. Clinkscales,’ said the landlady, having heard the sound of footsteps upon his entrance.

‘You couldn’t have nobody better, Mrs. Honniball, could you?’ asked the visitor, with a grin, and at the same time throwing the newspaper on to the seat beside him. ‘But that’s always the way. You never miss your mother till she’s gone. You’ll find out my value when I’m out of reach.’

‘You do good to the house, Mr. Clinkscales, there be no gainsaying it. What wi’ your learnin’ an’ all.’

‘I wish all could see as clear as you can, Mrs. Honniball. Now reckon up last night. I kept count on purpose. There was the finger-raising, the thickest wrist, and South Wales; not to speak of Jay’s hay-rick, and the tumbler demonstration—five gallons—no, the last two were halves—four gallons o’ the best when you wouldn’t have had a

quart o' cider. I could see it in their eyes. They wanted bringing up to it, and there are no two opinions as to who brought 'em. You agree there, Mrs. Honniball ?'

'Iss, I'll not deny that. Honniball usself said it.'

'Why, of course, he couldn't help. Won't that stand a pint o' best, Mrs. Honniball—eh ?'

'We beunt unneighbourly, Mr. Clink-scales, as you've known these twenty years. You shall 'ev a pint for luck this morning, whether or no ; but I can't stop to talk wi' you.'

Mr. Clinkscales rubbed his hands before the fire whilst the ale was being drawn. This was an unexpected piece of good fortune, all owing to the particular morning mood of Mrs. Honniball. He could never depend upon her. When he had got the ale, he had little difficulty in excusing her company, knowing, as he said he did, what an excellent housewife she

was, and how she was always doing something for somebody.

When Christopher had just moistened his lips he walked in the direction of the window, handling in his breeches pocket the as yet unbroken threepence. That pint of ale must go a long way; supply his needs, in fact, until some rational neighbour should look in who would be willing to stand him another. It was against the man's principles to break into his own copper before the hours of the evening. It offered better opportunities for investment at that time than at any other.

He soon tired of looking from the window. As he was indifferent to the attraction of that ivy-covered projecting gable and the black and white cottage beside it, there was very little to engage his attentions. There was a dog or two sniffing about the strip of grass between the footpath and the roadway, and some ducks in the pond lower down, but no other form

of life was visible. Shrugging his shoulders and audibly grumbling, he returned to his corner by the fire.

‘Ugh ! Nineteenth century, near the end ! Might as well be in the fifteenth. More liquor then, ’xpect. Damned luck ; damned luck.’

He again took up the paper and puffed away at his pipe. He had not been still long, before there were sounds of footsteps upon the threshold, and Michael Wayfer walked forward into the room.

‘Ha, my boy !’ cried Clinkscapes, joyously. ‘Just the man I wanted. Come and be comfortable.’

Wayfer made no reply, but pulled a chair up to the fire and spread his hands out before him.

‘Things are quiet,’ Clinkscapes went on. ‘I never knew such a God-forsaken hole as this. Nothing to do.’

The new comer obtained his liquor and took a draught of it.

‘Of course there’s nothing to do, except to get bankrupt. Nothing ’ll pay in the country.’

‘That’s what you rich farmers say,’ replied the other; ‘but you make your money all the same.’

‘That’s a lie, Clinky. I’m out of pocket every year. We shan’t get on till we get Ireland over here. Things ’ud do if there were no rents, or if there were reasonable rents.’

‘Ay ay, you’re right enough there. The land question wants looking to; but it is in your own hands.’

‘It isn’t in our own hands at all. What can we do?’

‘Air your grievances. Support the right men. There are some fine men springing up now. You’ll see changes, Michael. But you’re in bad hands. It is the very devil to have a parson for a landlord, and that’s a truism.’

‘That’s the first true word you’ve said.’

‘How are you getting on with the Bew-glass affair?’ said Clinkscapes, lowering his voice as he spoke.

‘Getting on! I’m not getting on at all. How can I get on with it. It’s enough to make a fellow swear to think of it. What did the old fool want to leave that money to the girl for? That would have paid it. He knew what times were. He might have kept his old chaps shut to the end. I was a damned fool to fetch the fellow to him. Nobody ’ud have known anything about it but for that. It makes me mad sometimes.’

As Clinkscapes listened, he was drawing some indefinite diagram upon the table with the aid of the end of his pipe and some spilt beer. After a few seconds he looked up with a ludicrous aspect of seriousness in his looks.

‘Now, look here, Michael,’—he spoke in a low tone and leaned his face forward to his companion—‘I have been studying this

case, and I'll give you my opinion. You needn't pay that money at all, if you don't want to.'

Wayfer looked in surprise at his adviser, and then replied, rather impatiently,

'But they know about it. They'll go to law.'

'They can't go to law. They have nothing to go to law upon. They have nothing to prove the claim, man. You told me that they didn't even know the amount of it. Your father was near his end, you can swear that his head was deranged at the time. They can't make you pay the money unless you like.'

Wayfer fixed his eyes upon the fire, and for some time there was silence. Then he looked into the other's face.

'You are right, Clinky, I'll think about it,' he said, slowly.

Clinkscale was speedily drinking the last half of his ale, and presently he replaced the empty glass upon the table

ostentatiously. Wayfer was too absorbed to take the hint immediately.

‘Yes, I’ll think about it,’ he repeated. ‘They can’t prove it. They’ve no document of it.’

Clinkscals chuckled in the manner habitual with him.

‘Here, Mrs. Honniball!’ shouted Wayfer. ‘Bring us a quart o’ your best,—but, nay, we’ll have something stronger. What ’ll you have, Clinky?’

‘Whisky and lemon,’ replied the other, his eyes running over with inward laughter, which they very easily did.

The two glasses of mingled whisky and lemonade were brought, and the conversation resumed.

Presently the sound of a cart rumbling up the village street took Wayfer to the window. He looked out and saw a heavy four-wheeled wain with a semi-circular covering upon it coming up the road.

‘Who is it?’ asked Clinkscals.

‘Old Peter; he’ll come in, I’ll bet.’

Wayfer was right. The cart stopped in the middle of the road, and a heavy step was at the doorway. The carter put his head over the panels which formed the back of the seat occupied by the Mayor.

‘Come in, Peter,’ cried Clinkscapes. ‘Plenty of room.’

‘Cold, Master Clinkscapes; uncommon cold,’ said Peter, coming forward to the fire, with much sniffing of the nose, and bringing the cold outer air with him in the flaps of that long white coat of his. He gave a knock with his cart-whip upon the table as he took a seat.

‘Been to Dorm’tley, Peter?’

‘Eess. ’T be a blake road, Master Clinkscapes. I’ll ’ev a quart o’ threepenny ale, if you please, Mrs. Honniball; I be uncommon flat,’ added Peter, turning to the landlady who had come in to his summons.

‘’St brought my kettle back, Peter?’

asked the woman before going to get the ale.

‘O, eess, o’ course,’ replied the old carter, getting up from his seat. ‘I’d clean forgot it: my recollection be a-getting so middlin’. I ’ev it sure enough, Mrs. Honniball.’

When Peter had handed over the kettle and it was seen to be right, he took up the mug which had been placed on the table and raised it slowly to his lips. His eyes twinkled at the foam lingering on the surface, and then he looked towards Wayfer with: ‘My ’spects to ’e, Master Wayfer; and Master Clinkscapes an’ all,’ he added, turned towards that worthy. With that Peter took a deep draught of the liquor. Clinkscapes had his eyes fixed upon the countryman all the time with a critical gaze. He gave an audible chuckle as the mug was replaced upon the table.

‘Feel better, Peter?’

‘I do, Master Clinkscapes. Ale seems more solider ’an cider this cold weather.’

‘Cider, bah! ’Teunt fit for pigs; ’t least not for those as have any intellects. Thin, Peter, thin.’

‘I ’ev heard ’e say that afore, Master Clinkscates; but it beunt so weak as e’d imagine. But, of course, ye be a town-bred man, and I’ve heard ’em say as it eunt thought much on in the towns. It do well enough for the like o’ we.’

‘Certainly, man. As I say, you’ve no intellect to feed. You can always judge of a man by his liquor. If cider don’t give a man gripes, he has a poor head-piece.’

Wayfer laughed, and the carter gazed for some seconds into the fire.

‘Do the learnin’ affect the innards, then, Master Clinkscates?’ he inquired at last.

‘Of course it do. Do you expect a scholar to have the same innards as a carter?’

‘Well,’ mused Peter, ‘I never knawed that afore . . . But I ’ud rather ’ev the cider, arter all,’ added he. ‘I can’t think

as the learning be as useful on a hot day in harvest.'

'You're not far wrong, Peter,' interposed Wayfer, who was, for the most part, absorbed in his own thoughts.

'There were a rick a-fire at Foxcote last night, Mister Clinkscals. 'T be a-smoking still—was doing as I comed by, however.'

The two others looked up with alacrity at this piece of information.

'Rick fire! How did it catch?' asked Wayfer.

'Em didn't rightly knaw; but it seemed by appearance to ha' been done o' purpose, so 'em telled me.'

'Sure to have been done on purpose, of course,' said Clinkscals. 'They're not over fond of Yarnold.'

''Twere only a rick o' straw, for Master Yarnold had thrashed early; moreover, ur be fully insured, so ur 'unt lose much. But 'em say as ur were flitting about i'

the night a-feared most despart. 'Em thought as he were demented.'

'It didn't get to any buildings, then?' said Wayfer.

'Noa; no buildings. O, noa; they kep' it off the hayricks an' all.'

'I wonder who's starting that game. You'll see that there'll be some more before they've done. One fire never comes alone; not when it is the work of an incendiary.'

'There's like to be more, I 'xpects, Master Clinkscals. But I can't see what good 'em gets by burning good stuff. It beunt no loss to nobody, only to the insurances.'

'It is to give 'scape to their feelings, Peter. They are discontented with the state of things, and no cause to wonder. Aren't you discontented yourself?'

'Noa, that I beunt.'

'Then you ought to be,' exclaimed Clinkscals. 'You would be if you had

any intellect. You ought to be taught to be.'

'I be uncommon thankful as I 'evn't no intelleck,' replied the carter, rising up from his chair to go. 'It do appear to be a curious concern. It never do no good, I believe ; begging your pardon, Master Clinkscapes. 'E tell me as it makes your innards keck over cider, and makes 'e discontented wi' the work as 'e 'ev to do. Seemingly it teaches 'e wrong religion an' all. 'Em tell me as ye be all infidels in the towns, however.'

Peter Rule had reached the door by the time he had finished his remarkable oration.

'A man can't argue with you, Peter, so you had better get off to your work. You're an animal.'

'Eess, I ull, Master Clinkscapes. I'll say good-day to 'e ;' and the carter departed.

'By gum, I must get mine insured if

they are getting to that work,' observed Wayfer, when the two were together.

'I should, Michael; but they won't come your way. They can't abide Yarnold. They've nothing against you.'

'But look here, Christopher——'

Wayfer was interrupted by yet another comer. Shuffling footsteps were heard in the doorway, and both faces were turned in that direction. A man appeared there dressed like a labourer, with a pinched, discontented-looking visage.

'Cold,' said he, in a surly tone, walking forward to a chair.

'It is cold, Master Riley,' returned Clinkscapes. 'Make yourself comfortable.'

No word passed between Wayfer and the new-comer, but looks did. They were obviously upon no good footing.

'Have you heard of this rick-fire, Riley?' asked Clinkscapes.

'Noa; what rick-fire?'

Clinkscapes gave what information he

had, to which the other seemed to pay great attention.

Wayfer was going to the door.

‘I’ll see you again, Clinkscapes,’ he said, as he passed him. ‘You can come up to-night, if you like.’

When the other two were alone, Clinkscapes made an attempt to continue the conversation, but silence had fallen upon Riley. He was evidently disinclined to talk, so his companion acquiesced. The latter thrust his pipe between the bars of the grate to re-light it, and then took up the paper. Riley also made preparations for smoking. He produced a black clay pipe and a piece of twist from one waistcoat pocket, and a large knife from the other. He cut up the tobacco in his left palm, and then scooped it into the pipe, pressing it well in with a very dirty forefinger. His pipe, too, was then thrust between the bars, and he began afterwards to puff away in silence.

This last comer was an unpleasant-looking man, by no means cleanly of person. His name was Ephraim Riley, and he was the husband of Michael Wayfer's half-sister, of whom we have already had mention. Notwithstanding his unfavourable appearance, he was entitled to the name of petty farmer, for he rented about sixty acres of mixed land, possessed a team of ill-conditioned horses, a couple of cows, some pigs, and so forth. He did not look particularly flourishing, nor would one have taken him for an individual of enterprise. He had, nevertheless, begun his life as an ordinary day labourer, whereas he now had a stout youth in his own employment.

It was generally thought that much of his advancement was attributable to his wife, and doubtless there was much truth in this popular supposition. She at least was born of an energetic stock (her father, Jonathan Wayfer, having raised himself

from the rank of carter), and we can readily suppose that she had inherited a share of his practical characteristics. It was quite possible for her to have felt that what her father had been able to accomplish her husband could do as well—under the guidance, at least, of her own judicious self. Perhaps, also, her father's altered position in the world aroused some sort of pride in her, and suggested the necessity of altering her own.

Ephraim Riley's advancement seemed to have brought him but little satisfaction. He had not been a badly-disposed man, but merely one lacking energy and ambition. His father-in-law had accurately gauged him, and had aptly announced his decision.

‘Ephraim Riley,’ he said, ‘were but a poor creature, and couldn't do better than wamble in another man's furrow.’

He could have gone on happily enough as an unskilled labourer at ten shillings a

week, doing his work just well enough to pass with a not over-strict employer. Under such conditions, he would have slept soundly at nights. But, for this life of satisfaction, he must not have for a wife Susannah Wayfer. With her it was impossible. She goaded him to action for which he was in no way fitted, and yet which he had not sufficient resolution to resist. The consequence was that in course of time he had lost his dull equability of temper, and had got in its place a sour moroseness which made his life a torment to himself, as well as an encumbrance to others. The marvel was that he had not taken to drinking. He had never been known to be the worse for liquor.

Notwithstanding his altered position, the man was still body and soul a labourer. In the grumbling state to which he had got, he did not grumble about the position of farmers, but about that of labourers. Clinkscale found him a very different

individual to handle from the stubborn unimpressionable Peter Rule. Discontented with his own position in the world, Riley was easily persuaded that our planet was topsy-turvy from its foundation. Clinkscapes, therefore, generally found in him an appreciative listener.

The disagreement between Wayfer and this man was a family one. Michael's father had been bitterly opposed to Riley's marriage with his daughter, and a violent quarrel had been the consequence. This the son had inherited, and the ill-footing received constant nourishment from the attitude of Michael himself to his brother-in-law. The son thought no better of Riley than the father had done, and he took no greater pains to disguise his contemptuous feelings towards him. Naturally this had engendered a very deeply-rooted antipathy in the mind of the despised. Sluggish as Riley's nature was in general, in this respect it partook of a very active

degree of virulence. He never spoke much about it, but no doubt his resentment only gnawed the deeper by reason of his silent nursing of it.

By way of getting his companion's thoughts into the right direction, Clink-scales began to read out the list of local bankrupts which appeared in the *Dor-mantley Mirror*. He was not ostensibly addressing his remarks to his moody friend, but as there was no third person present, and as Clink-scales was beyond the primitive necessity of reading to himself aloud, his object was sufficiently apparent.

From the *Gazette* extracts the reader wandered to a law report,—a case in which a landlord had recovered a considerable sum from a tenant under circumstances which appeared harsh to Clink-scales. It was all new to Riley, for, although the information had been for several days before the public, it had failed to reach him. He was not good at reading, and in

consequence but seldom handled a newspaper. The effect upon him was perceptible, and, when Clinkscales was well advanced in a third extract anent disputed tithes, his companion was fully aroused.

‘Them tithes be a knavish concern,’ he interposed, as a comment upon the case.

‘Robbery, robbery,’ added the other.

‘Go on, Master Clinkscales.’

‘There now, Master Riley, isn’t that bigoted robbery?’ asked the reader, when he had done, looking up with the eye-glasses on the tip of his nose. ‘Isn’t that plundering the poor, eh?’

‘It do seem uncommon like it. But he were only a farmer.’

‘But what affects a farmer affects you. You’re all in the same boat. They talk about the tithes falling on the landlord, but it’s all sawdust. Ain’t that case proof enough, Riley? What can they say after that?’

‘I dunt want to pay the parsons; ’em dwunt do nothing for I.’

‘Of course they don’t; but the people won’t see it. Now look at this new man here. He gets your money, and what does he do with it? He don’t spend a penny in the village. Last week he gave fifty pounds for one bit of an old book, and that’s more than a man can earn in a year with working thirteen hours a day. His missus drives about the country, sticking herself up with the gentry instead of doing something for the people.’

‘But Mr. Bewglass were of a different sort,’ suggested Riley.

‘Of course he was. I’ll say nothing against him; but there’s an exception to every rule. And you see what he comes to. There’s his widow left without a penny, and now this man’s claiming five hundred pounds from her to build up his stables and farm buildings.’

‘Be that so, Master Clinkscapes?’ asked

Riley, positively with some display of interest in the topic.

‘Of course it be, man. I shouldn’t be surprised to see her sold up. They tell me that he has the law to do it.’

‘By gum, that beats all that ever I heard. Mr. Bewglass were kind to me. Ur promised as I should be parish clerk if old Caldicott ’ud ha’ died.’

‘But talking of Bewglass, puts me in mind of Michael Wayfer. What is the difference between you?’

Riley’s face changed at once.

‘That be nothing to you, Master Clink-scales,’ he said, in a surly tone.

‘That’s a truism, too,’ replied Clink-scales, with a chuckle. ‘I meant no offence, man. It seems to me, though, that you might be useful to each other if you were friends. He’s the right sort is Michael Wayfer.’

‘Ur ’ev done no good to I, however.’

‘You know your own business, of course.

I don't want to interfere. 'St going to the supper to-morrow ?'

'Eess. I'll go in for a bit. Did 'em catch they as set that rick a-fire, Master Clinkscates ?'

'They have not done yet. They won't catch 'em. Nobody's ever caught at that work.'

After this, Riley gradually relapsed into his former state of reserve. Try how Clinkscates would, he was unable to draw him out again. The clouds, from which his face had not been at any time free, were welded into one uniform veil. The scanty ditch-water flow of his conversation wholly ceased. Presently he drank off his ale, and, without another syllable, departed. Mr. Clinkscates continued to muse about him as he looked into the fire.

'Just the man for dirty work. He'd shoot Wayfer if he was paid for it.'

CHAPTER VII.

REFLECTIONS.

As Michael Wayfer was going up the village from the inn, busied with that thought which Clinkscles had imparted to him, he encountered Joice Radway. The meeting was an unfortunate one, as was obvious from the faces of both parties. Wayfer was not ignorant of the aspect his conduct must assume to the eyes of people in general, nor was he ignorant of Joice's perception of it. Her attitude to it, moreover, made his position the more difficult. Had she taunted him with his faithless behaviour, as he knew the generality of girls would have done, his course would have been easy enough. It was Joice's

patience which touched what was human in his nature, and brought about his feeling of discomfort. Since the interview in the dark, she had not passed another word upon the matter.

In the present pre-occupied state of his mind, the meeting was peculiarly distasteful. He had not the face to entirely ignore her, nor yet to pass her by as an ordinary acquaintance: so when they came up to each other he stopped. He attempted a smile as he did so.

‘All right, Joice?’ he said.

‘Yes, Michael.’

‘I can’t stay now, as I am busy. You—you’ll come to the dance to-morrow night, I suppose?’

The tone was a dagger in the heart of the other, although Wayfer had intended it to be quite pleasant.

‘Yes, I shall come. You will be there too?’—she looked up to his face as she spoke.

‘Oh, yes. Good-bye.’ And, with a nod, he went on his way.

For the rest of the day Joice was miserable. Not that in these days she was ever much otherwise; but there are degrees even in wretchedness.

Her great perplexity lay in deciding what to do; for, strange as it may seem, it did not occur to her to do nothing. True, she was effectually checked as regarded Wayfer himself. She was disabled for further action towards him. She was more nervous in commencing action in another quarter, although she was aware of the direction in which it should lie. Joice knew quite well that girls were daily deserted: deserted too in painful circumstances with which her own offered no comparison. But she shrank from realising that such fate awaited her. We never can realise to ourselves that a threatened calamity will actually befall us. Something will interpose to avert it. Why

Wayfer had wearied of her she did not pretend to determine; but, as to who was to benefit by the change, she had a very accurate suspicion. It was this that made her position the more difficult. She had a genuine love for Miss Sulby. The latter had even shown her the most substantial marks of kindness, and how could she go before her with the upbraiding of jealousy on her lips? But Ruth knew, thought Joice, knew how her whole life was wrapped up in it.

With her father, Joice had not discussed her situation. Both preserved a rigid reticence with regard to it. The old man had not failed to notice the change in his daughter of late, nor had he had any difficulty in assigning to it a cause. It was as obvious to him as it was to his daughter that Michael Wayfer had altered in his attitude towards them; but, unlike Joice, he attributed it to a reason quite wide of the mark. Wayfer's father was dead; he

now had money and a farm of his own ; he was altogether in a different position from when he first took a fancy to Joice. Giles Radway knew enough of the world for this. He was well aware of the humbleness of his own position in the eyes of that world, and of course it was natural enough that the promising young farmer should turn his attention somewhat higher.

Still, there was much genuine philosophy in the old countryman. As he thought of these things, a smile played upon his face at the recollection of some episode in early life in which the father of this very Wayfer had played a part. In that vision of the past, Giles Radway was the benefactor and Jonathan Wayfer the suppliant. But Giles entertained no shadow of resentment. He possessed a happy, objective frame of mind, (the result of the reality of his religion,) which made him equal to the very highest of philosophers. Never had he held out his hand from any

sordid motive, therefore he was indifferent to all ingratitude and neglect. Theirs was the loss not his. For his part, he could pass this pleasant smile upon the transactions. However, Giles's reading of the present situation was not quite accurate. His daughter had hit it better; but she had the advantage of that penetrative power of reading which belongs to love's fine wit. No thought like this of her father's had ever crossed Joice's mind; she handled merely the resultant facts.

So Michael was going to the dance: the thought of this occupied her most of the afternoon. She could think of nothing but Mr. Kimble's harvest supper. It was not that her mind was pleasantly employed in the vision of dancing with partners in that large illuminated granary, amidst the exhilarating strains of fiddle and clarionet, and the incessant clatter of tongues. She looked forward to it with widely different sensations from those she had

experienced last year. Tremors there were, it is true, but not such as those with which we anticipate keen pleasures. The event was to decide something which lay heavy on her mind. There she would come into contact with Miss Sulby and Michael Wayfer together, and the informal nature of the entertainment would enable her to profit by the situation.

At last, when daylight had almost gone, her father returned home to tea, or rather to a mixed meal of dinner and tea. He had been busy spreading stones upon the road over the hill-top, so that it had been inconvenient for him to reach home at midday. On such occasions he took with him some bread and cheese, and a small bottle of home-made parsnip wine diluted with water, to serve for luncheon, and Joice had something extra for him at tea-time. A savoury odour greeted Giles's nostrils as he entered his dusky cottage, and he saw his daughter in the light of the

fire leaning over a frying-pan. By the time the old man was seated, she had emptied the contents into a vegetable dish which stood upon the fender, and then she lit the lamp, and pulled down the blinds.

‘Now, father, it is ready. Are you cold?’

‘Rather cold, Joice; but this scarf do make a vast odds. It be a-closing-in rather damp to-night.’

The two pulled up to the table and Joice poured out the tea. Giles addressed himself to the vegetable dish. In the lamp-light it was seen to contain a dark-coloured conglomerate, which consisted, in fact, of a preparation of miscellaneous vegetables which had remained over from former meals. They were now blended into this irrerecognizable mixture by being chopped up together and fried in bacon fat.

They did not converse much at meals. After they had proceeded for some time in

silence, Joice spoke. The old man had just put his cup upon the cloth, and was raising the saucer to his lips.

‘Why does not Miss Sulby come to the singing-class now, father?’ she said, looking down at her plate.

‘That I don’t rightly know, Joice,’ was the reply. ‘But I believe it were as some o’ the young men wanted to make friends. Her yent like a-many o’ the girls, any more than you be yourself; but her didn’t tell me a dale about the matter. Her never did say much about herself as you know. It beunt from no displeasure with we; very far from it, in fact. O, no, her begged me not to imagine as it were that.’

‘I know it is not that,’ said Joice, ‘for she is just the same to us.’

‘Just the same, o’ course,’ assented the old man, as he helped himself to the dish that was before him.

After that they again lapsed into silence.

When Joice had washed and put away

the tea-things, she sat down in a chair opposite to her father. He was handling his fiddle with the intention, as he had stated, of playing over the airs which would be wanted for the next day's dancing. He had scarcely begun when the cottage door was opened and closed. This was followed by a knock at their inner door, and immediately thereafter a head appeared through the doorway.

‘Now then, Master Radway, can you give shelter to a tramp?’

‘Why, Mr. Kimble!’ exclaimed Radway, when his scrutinizing glance had given way to laughter. ‘Come in, sir, pray.’

The visitor accepted the invitation and came forward into the room.

‘Haven’t the nightingales come yet then?’

‘No, sir, not to-night,’ replied Giles, as well as he could through his laughter. ‘It beunt their night.’

Giles enjoyed mightily this gentleman’s

vein of mirth, and thought nobody in the world could excel him in joking. As Mr. Kimble came forward, he greeted Joice, and pulled up a chair to her side.

This visitor was the principal farmer in Shipcombe, and always a good friend to Giles. As Mr. Kimble took his seat, Radway fixed radiant eyes upon his face. It was a countenance to look upon with envy, at least in its present aspect of good humour. The whole face in the lamp-light was ruddy with the glow of obtrusive health. The cold night air had thus heightened it, but Mr. Kimble was at no time pale. The bushy whiskers on each cheek were quite grey, as was also his thick head of hair. His mouth was kept free by the razor and was an unmistakable index to the man. One would have said that the face was capable of a very different expression from its present one, if the attendant circumstances were different. Those lips were

never unclinchd without purpose, if it were only to crack a bad joke. Energy peeped out at all points, to the exclusion, some might have thought, of the gentler qualities. It was hard to imagine such a man capable of a mean action; but it would not have surprised one to be told that he might have kept to the letter of a bond when another would have stretched it out of sympathy. Justice and benevolence are not synonymous. Mr. Kimble had both, but in practice the two were not likely to clash in his hands. However, it may be safely hazarded that a man given to cracking such bad jokes as those of Mr. Kimble, could never be anything but human.

Master Radway's testimony was undoubtedly worth something, and his feeling was obvious enough in his face. There was nothing actually familiar in his attitude, but at the same time he appeared perfectly at ease. He did not go out of his way to

be deferential, as he undoubtedly did towards the majority of those of Mr. Kimble's class. Giles felt towards this gentleman as most of us feel towards those who understand us, and whose good opinion we are proud to call ours. This genial feeling was heightened in Giles's case because of the superiority of his friend's social position. Perhaps nothing could display more strongly the essential worthiness of the nature of both.

'I was just coming up from Mrs. Bewglass,' said the visitor, when they were all seated, 'so I thought I'd look in to see that you were ready for the supper to-morrow night, Giles. You've not broken all your strings?'

'O, no, sir. All sound as a bell. I was but just a-going to try them.'

'Go a-head, then.'

Giles played through the 'Keel Row,' to which Mr. Kimble whistled by way of accompaniment.

‘That’ll do,’ cried Mr. Kimble, when it was finished. ‘You’re coming, Joice, of course?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘There’d be plenty disappointed, if you didn’t. I’ll answer for that—eh, Giles?’

The young woman blushed, and her father laughed.

‘I hear as things be a-going badly with Mrs. Bewglass, sir,’ remarked Giles, after that.

‘Yes, yes, very badly. But who has been gossiping to you about it?’

‘It be but the general rumour,’ the old man hastened to assert. ‘Poor lady, it be hard at her time of life!’

‘It is. But I mustn’t stay any longer. Don’t be late to-morrow, Giles.’

Mr. Kimble was again upon his feet, and making his way towards the door.

‘O, no, sir.’

‘You’d better thresh your wheat this week, Giles,’ remarked the farmer, as he

stood in the doorway. 'We can spare the machine any day you want it.'

'Thank you, sir, I'm sure,' replied the other, with a bow. 'I see the prices be up. They tell me as the Lammas wheat be a-casting badly.'

'Very badly. Good-night, Joice ; good-night, Giles ;' and the visitor had gone.

Radway returned to the fireside.

'Quite one of the old sort, Joice,' he remarked. 'There be but few like him, however.'

'He did not want to talk of Mrs. Bewglass. You ought not to have mentioned it, father.'

'True enough. It were my mistake. But there'll be no offence ; no harm done.'

'Did Mr. Bewglass die very much in debt, father?'

'O, no, very far from it. It be that surveyor's report for what they call dilapidations as be the item, so they tell me. The vicar, Mr. Silverside, be a-claiming

nearly four hundred pounds from the poor lady, and I understand as her have nothing to pay it with.'

'But Mr. Gabriel will help his mother.'

'That ur would o' course; but ur've no money, Joice. Only just enough to live on, however, and to keep his mother an' all.'

'Well, I think law is a wicked thing,' concluded the daughter, with emphasis.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DANCE IN THE GRANARY.

THE following day was the eventful Wednesday, long looked forward to in Shipcombe, and in the evening was held the harvest supper. It was later than usual this year, first on account of Mr. Kimble's hill crops being seriously retarded by the bad autumn weather, and latterly by several engagements of the good farmer himself. He never had the supper until he could be present to preside in person. He was the only farmer in the district who kept up the old custom, and it was consequently an occurrence of some importance to the neighbourhood. Mr. Kimble, being somewhat old-fashioned, was not so

squeamish as to grudge his men the opportunity of getting drunk once a year at his expense, immoral as we are rightly growing to consider it in these days. Everybody in the district attended, at the after-supper dance if not at the actual feast. It was quite as great an event as the wake itself, and much greater than the club dinner, because this latter institution was confined to the male population mainly.

Mr. Kimble's gardener had been active for a day or two in doing what was possible for the decoration of the granary. In this work he had had an energetic ally in Miss Dorothy Silverside. As her father had only held the vicarage for about twelve months, she still showed a considerable zeal in all popular and social undertakings of the parish; much to the disapprobation, it may be mentioned, of her mother. This lady had an intense repugnance towards anything that was vulgar. She could contribute her subscription,

allow her name to appear as a patroness, even dispense soups and jellies (through her cook) with the most philanthropic of ladies; but she could not personally come in contact with the common life around her. Her daughter, on the other hand, saw no reason why she should not do in her own person what her mother preferred to do vicariously. The result of the joint efforts of the gardener and the young lady was a very tasteful disposal about the granary of corn, flowers, shrubs, and evergreens. When lit up in anticipation of the guests, the room had a very unbarnlike appearance.

Long before nine o'clock, the hour appointed for the dancing to begin, troops of villagers and servants from the neighbouring farms were flocking to the rendezvous. All were in Sunday attire, and radiant with holiday countenances. The air of the assembly-room grew redolent of various pomades and inexpensive species of scent, which blended with the inevitable

chaff-like aroma of a granary and the carbonic acid from the plants, in addition to the odour from the paraffin lamps. To pass the time until the principal detachment should join them,—those partaking of the supper at the house,—the youth indulged in various forms of primitive horse-play. Leap-frog of a clumsy kind for the more active; prodding in the stomach and consequent simulated wrestling for those who were heavier, and who yet had equal need of passing off somehow the superabundant energy.

Clinkscale was there, come to claim a share of the beer, and he was at present equally taken up with his patronizing disquisitions to the elders and his resentment of the disrespectful familiarity of youths. He felt some relief at the appearance of his friend Michael Wayfer, and the two immediately joined in separate conversation.

Very soon after the arrival of Wayfer, a gentleman entered the place who seemed

a stranger amongst those assembled there. He surveyed the room with curiosity, but no face seemed to respond to his with recognition. It was impossible to think him an agriculturist, such a contrast was he to all those who were present. He was obviously well advanced in middle age, for his sandy beard was tinged with grey and his figure displayed the proportions of maturity. He was clothed with some appearance of elaboration, and in a manner which made his position in life more difficult to determine. Nothing pronounced him flagrantly vulgar, although he did not bear the stamp of refined breeding; his frock coat was such as eminently became him, and his watch chain was of quite modest pretensions. That jingling, which was audible as he moved, proceeded from no obtrusive seal pendants, but from an inoffensive rimless eye-glass which hung by a black cord from around his neck, and dangled low down against his waistcoat.

The gentleman's fingers were often playing in its vicinity, apparently more from nervousness than ostentation, for the glass had not yet been raised to his eye. At length, something suspended from a beam over his head engaged his attention, and he raised his face to look more closely at it through his eye-glass. The movement offered some assistance in forming a judgment of him, by displaying the point at which his clothing most distinctly betrayed him. His beard had hitherto screened his brilliant tie, which filled the open space in his waistcoat with a patch suggesting the midsummer sky. It was, moreover, that flat kind of expanse which inevitably gives a hint of coloured flannel behind. The visitor, then, must be of plebeian extraction.

His eye had surveyed all the room and its decorations before it fell upon Wayfer and Clinkscapes. When at last these two were observed in a far corner of the room,

the gentleman crossed over with alacrity and held forth his hand to the young farmer. Wayfer cast his eyes upon him with a look of surprise.

‘How do you do, Mr. Wayfer? The mirth is not yet at its height.’

‘Why, how do you do, Mr. Philpin? Who on earth thought of seeing you here?’

‘Come—a—come to take a part in the vanity, Mr. Wayfer.’

‘Mr. Philpin, to be sure!’ exclaimed Clinkscale, holding forth his hand in his turn, with a scrutinizing glance at the visitor’s coat. ‘Didn’t recognize you for the moment, sir.’

Mr. Philpin it undoubtedly was, that gentleman whom we saw in authority in the lawyer’s office and whom most of us have doubtless forgotten. It was difficult to recognise him in the midst of such incongruous surroundings.

‘I hope times are well with you, Mr.

‘Clinkscapes,’ said the quasi-lawyer, slightly bowing as he took the other’s hand.

‘Might be better, sir, and that’s a truism. It’s a vile century, Mr. Philpin; a time of transition when men of intellect go to the wall. Don’t you find it so?’

‘There’s much in what you say, Mr. Clinkscapes,’ replied Philpin, using an uncompromising phrase as less offensive than a contradiction or expression of disagreement.

‘Why, of course. Did you ever study logic, sir? But of course you have acquired it in the course of your profession. I can prove to you, Mr. Philpin, by logic that everything, institution, social, political, and—and cetera is in a bad way. All rotten, and must be carted away if the world is to breathe. First, now——’

Mr. Clinkscapes’ harangue was cut short by the distant strains of a violin and the consequent bustle of preparation amongst those assembled. All unseemly jesting was

immediately stopped, and the youths, who but a moment before had been so remarkably active, lapsed into the most sheepish of rustics. The sound of the music came nearer, and the confused tread of feet was heard in the rick-yard below. The scuffle advanced up the stone steps, and heads appeared through that doorway in the corner. All eyes were turned towards it with eagerness, and murmured applause greeted the first couple that stepped forward. These were Mr. and Mrs. Kimble in person. A few of their select friends were behind them; then came the body of farm-servants. Amongst them were the musicians of the evening: Mr. Giles Radway, the violin, and Mr. Nathan Bench, the clarionet.

When all had got settled into places, the host stepped forward to the front. Silence fell upon the whole assembly.

‘I am not going to make a speech, my friends,’ Mr. Kimble began, ‘as you have

not come to see or hear me. I only wish to bid you all welcome, and to express my pleasure at seeing so many of you assembled. I think these yearly meetings do every one of us good, and it appears that you are of my opinion. As has been the case for the last fifteen years, the arrangements to-night are in the hands of my gardener, Mr. Jelf, and I believe he knows how to give you general satisfaction. You all know the one condition that I make, and it is hardly necessary to repeat it. To Mr. Jelf must all differences be referred, and I expect implicit obedience to his directions. Now I hope you will enjoy yourselves thoroughly, and have nothing to regret when it is over.'

Directly Mr. Kimble's voice had ceased, another was raised at the opposite end of the room. It was immediately recognised as that of Mr. Christopher Clink-scales.

'Three cheers for Mr. and Mrs. Kimble!

Hip, hip, hurrah!!!' And very heartily they were given.

The ringing still lingered amongst the rafters, when the musical instruments broke forth. It was the irresistible 'Keel Row' that had been chosen, and no further invitation was found necessary. The two to whom had been awarded the honour of opening spun out on the expanse of boards before them, and they were immediately followed by others. All became at once a scene of bustle and dust.

No sooner had the dance thus commenced, than Mr. Kimble was looking anxiously about him. He was evidently in search of somebody. He elbowed his way about amongst the throng, looking in this direction and that, with obviously increasing impatience. At last he encountered Joice Radway, who wore anything but a merry countenance. The gentleman seized hold of her arm.

‘Where’s Miss Sulby, Joice? Have you seen her?’

Joice started at the question, as if it had touched a thought of her own.

‘I have not seen her, sir. I don’t think she has come.’

‘Not come! What the deuce does she mean?’

Again Mr. Kimble proceeded with his search, putting his question to several others he encountered. Nobody had seen the school-mistress; Joice, then, must be right in her conclusion. Now the master was elbowing his way to the door in the corner, and presently he was in the fresh night air. All the houses were distinguishable in the moonlight, and black shadows were thrown across the road. Mr. Kimble hastened to the silent school-house. The gate into the yard was locked, and he shook it quite angrily in his impatience. Simultaneously he called out at the top of

his voice, and was answered by the savage bark of Ruth's dog.

The voice must have been audible throughout the village, so that it would easily go through that closed door and shutters. It aroused no feeling of surprise in Miss Sulby. She knew Mr. Kimble by this time, and she had been fearing this sound through the whole of the evening. In imagination she had heard it before; but this time it was no delusion. She went nervously to the door and walked out to the gateway.

‘What on earth are you doing in there? Unlock this gate for me instantly.’

Ruth did so with all submission, having brought the key out with her for the purpose.

‘I didn't feel quite well,’ she muttered to her visitor, as she was doing it.

Mr. Kimble took her by the arm, and almost dragged her into the house. The dog had become silent at the known voice,

and followed the two through the doorway. When they stepped into the quiet lamp-light of the room, the gentleman turned Ruth round to face him, and laid a hand gently upon each of her shoulders. She looked up at him with a smile.

‘You don’t look as if you had much amiss. It’s nothing but those cursed books. Leave them and come along with me.’

‘I really don’t feel inclined for the uproar.’

‘Nonsense! It’s the very thing to do you good. I consider it an insult that you haven’t come.’

Ruth knew the futility of resisting him, nevertheless she made one further attempt.

‘I won’t have any excuses. You needn’t dance if you don’t feel inclined to, but come down to the room you shall. I have never had a better assembly. It is incomplete without you. The vicar and his daughter have come in. Now run and put

on your things, for the people will think I have left them.'

In a few minutes she was ready to accompany him. The lamp was left alight upon the table, and Ruth ordered the dog to his place upon the rug. The two then hurried off to the granary.

Others were on the look-out for Miss Sulby besides Joice Radway and the master of the feast. As soon as the dancing had commenced, Wayfer sidled off from his two elderly companions. Even Mr. Philpin showed an inclination to be moving, and was uneasy under Clinkscapes' dissertation. At last he could sustain his position no longer, and eagerly made use of his eye-glass. The next moment Mr. Clinkscapes was standing solitary.

It chanced that, as Mr. Philpin took his survey of the assembly, Mr. Kimble and the school-mistress had just joined it. They appeared to have given a direction to his footsteps, for his eyes were riveted

upon them as he proceeded. When within a few yards of where they were standing, he found that he was at the elbow of Michael Wayfer. The lawyer immediately mastered his diffidence, and, with an air of stately courtesy, presented himself to the provider of the entertainment.

‘Bless me, Philpin!’ cried Mr. Kimble, when he saw him, ‘you must be younger than I thought you, if you can come as far as this to see some dancing. Why didn’t you come in to supper?’

‘Should not have thought of presuming so far, sir,’ replied the other, with his customary bow.

At that moment Miss Sulby recognised him, and he showed his appreciation of her gracious remembrance.

‘Hem! good-evening, Miss Sulby;’ with a repetition of the stately obeisance.

‘What! You know Mr. Philpin, then, do you? I’ll be bound he has come over purposely to dance with you.’

There was perhaps more truth in the jest than was suspected ; at least, Mr. Philpin betrayed the slightest nervous confusion. He played vigorously with his eye-glass as he responded.

‘ Nothing would give me greater pleasure in my journey ;’ and his eyes rested upon the face of the school-mistress.

‘ Come, Miss Sulby, you’ll never be able to resist that,’ cried Mr. Kimble.

‘ May I have the pleasure ?’ added the gallant Mr. Philpin.

‘ I did not mean to dance at all to-night.’

‘ That’s nothing but a half sort of refusal. Don’t you be put off with it, Philpin. It will do you all the good in the world, my girl ; now won’t it, Bessie ?’ said Mr. Kimble, appealing to his wife.

‘ Yes, yes, Ruth ; dance with the gentleman.’

At that moment Ruth encountered the glance of Michael Wayfer.

‘Just one, then,’ she said, and accepted the hand which Mr. Philpin extended towards her.

‘I want one with you myself next,’ exclaimed Mr. Kimble, as they were whirled away into the throng.

Another pair almost immediately followed them. It was Wayfer and Joice Radway.

Mr. Philpin’s countenance was radiant. He had got all that he desired, all that he had travelled for from Dormantley that November night, and he looked supremely happy in the acquisition.

Another there was who was not far beneath him. She too had got her only wish. Joice could scarcely yet believe it, after all those gloomy forebodings. All was unreal about her; she was dancing on the clouds. Frequently had she to lift her eyes to his face to convince herself that it was not all a dream. But there could be no mistake; there was nothing intangible

about young Wayfer. It was his arm that was around her ; his breath that occasionally touched her. More than once Joice's tears were between the lashes, once one had broken the gates ; but nobody ever saw it. All that, at least, she knew must be hidden. Nothing on her part should spoil this wonderful restoration to favour. Perhaps she had been misunderstanding him of late.

Thus they spun away with all the appearance of enjoyment. No wicked fairy seemed present to chill those spirits with her spite. Even Clinkscale himself seemed content, for he had established himself by the barrels. His speeches to all who came for refreshment led only to additional merriment, for nobody was yet in a mood to pay him serious attention. It was the attempt of everybody to cajole him into a dance ; but in this nobody was able to succeed.

Mr. Kimble kept his eye upon Philpin, and a merry mischievous eye it was. As

the rotund gentleman whirled panting by him, the farmer launched good-natured jokes at his head, which were enjoyed by all within hearing. His wife felt occasionally called upon to repress him, but her reprimands were of little avail. Everybody to-night was a fit subject for his raillery, and he meant to give licence to his mirth.

At length the looked-for couple was missing, and Mr. Kimble set off to seek them. They were sitting on a bench in a far corner, recovering some degree of composure. One at least of them seemed to be in considerable need of it. Mr. Philpin held a crimson silk handkerchief to his forehead and audibly panted for breath.

‘I am afraid you have done too much, Mr. Philpin,’ observed Ruth, in a tone which quite ravished her partner.

‘No—pher—pher—urh—pher—O—no! It—has made—me twenty—years younger. How b-b-beautifully—you dance,

Miss Sulby. I could have gone on with it for ever.'

Ruth did succeed in restraining her smile.

'But,' went on the gentleman through his gasps; 'but it is awkward that one cannot talk.'

'It is not the most convenient situation for conversation.'

'Would you like some fresh air, Miss Sulby?' said Philpin, as he put his handkerchief away.

'O, no, thank you.'

'Did—did you receive the paper, Miss Sulby? Marked—the "Ode to Womanhood"?'

Mr. Philpin put the question under his breath. Ruth displayed her surprise.

'You did! Ha, very good—not a word! But won't you come into the air for a minute or two? You look heated, and this room is getting——'

'No, thank you. I shall go home before very long. I only came for a short time as Mr. Kimble wished it.'

‘But,—but you will not go home alone?’

‘O, yes, Mr. Philpin, I shall. There is nothing to fear in Shipcombe. I have only a short distance to go.’

‘But you will not deny me the privilege——’

Something at that moment flashed across the school-mistress’s mind. Wayfer and Joice had passed closely before her, perhaps it was they that had prompted the thought. She altered the reply which she had been about to give.

‘I should be sorry to interrupt your enjoyment, when you have come so far——’

‘Interrupt my enjoyment! If you go, you—my dear Miss Sulby, I have no enjoyment—nothing would give me greater pleasure than to accompany you.’

‘It is very kind of you, Mr. Philpin. I shall be glad then to accept of your company.’

See the look upon the good man’s face.

He did indeed at that moment look quite young again. At the next his countenance fell. Mr. Kimble had just come in sight.

‘You will let me know when you are ready?’ said Philpin, in a hurried way to his companion.

‘Well done, Philpin, my man!’ was the farmer’s jovial greeting. ‘You beat us all to smithereens.’

‘All the praise is due to my partner, sir,’ said Mr. Philpin, with the utmost modesty.

‘You had a good one, I know. But come, you will be wanting some refreshment. Miss Sulby will excuse you for a few minutes.’

The two went in the direction of Clink-scales’ corner, and presently Ruth also moved from her place. Before the latter had gone very far along the room, she found Joice sitting upon a seat by herself. They greeted each other with pleasure, and Ruth sat down upon the same bench.

Whilst they talked, a portly woman swept close before them and looked very fixedly at the school-mistress. The latter immediately recognized her, and acknowledged her by a slight inclination of the head. The woman thereupon stopped and asked if she could speak to Miss Sulby alone. Ruth rose up and the two walked leisurely away. Joice saw them disappear through a crowd.

The request had caused considerable surprise to Miss Sulby, and it was with curiosity she followed her companion to a corner. This woman had no children at the school, so that could not be the subject of the consultation. It was the larger of the two women who showed the most uneasiness. Ruth was tolerably composed.

‘I have been thinking about this money,’ began one of them.

‘You need not trouble about that, Mrs. Riley. I have not had another thought about it.’

Mrs. Riley stared into her companion's face until Ruth blushed.

'But I 'ev. You'd better take some of it back. I never wanted to take none of it from you.'

'I would rather not, thank you. It was never my intention to accept it. You have more right to it than I have.'

'S like I 'ev,' replied the other; 'but I dwunt feel over comfortable about it. It was yours by the will.'

'Never mind anything about that. I don't wish to have it, so let that satisfy you.'

'Well, 'e bist a queer un. Take a hunderd of it. I 'ev it, i' my skirt here.'

'No, thank you. If that is all you want to ask me, it is no use our talking.'

'Take fifty.'

'Not a penny. Give it to your sisters if you do not want it yourself.'

'Nay, that I 'unt!' cried the woman, with much determination.

‘Then do whatever you like with it, for I do not wish to have it.’

Ruth showed an inclination to move and put an end to the conversation.

‘Well, if I can’t move yer, I can’t: but dunt say as I got it unrighteously.’

‘I have never hinted at such a thing,’ said Ruth, emphatically.

‘No, I know you ’evn’t; but there be them as has.’

‘Of course, I can’t help that. You can tell them that I refuse to take it.’

The two passed again into the throng and separated.

It was some time later, when Miss Sulby was standing alone, with a thought of summoning Mr. Philpin to escort her home, that Michael Wayfer approached her. He had been endeavouring throughout the evening to bring about such an interview, but hitherto with no success. Miss Sulby had been with equal pertinacity plotting to frustrate him, and he suspected

it. It would have been quite simple for him to have asked her hand in the face of everybody present, and nobody would (yes, one, but only one would) have passed any comment upon it. It was perfectly reasonable that he should dance with the school-mistress, as much so as that he should dance with anybody else in the room; but he had not made the request. Not made it, because he had been unable to encounter her under what he considered favourable circumstances. A more experienced diplomatist would have acted very differently, as we know, and would without difficulty have achieved his desire.

However, at last he had caught Ruth as he had been hoping to do for so long. He was by her before she was aware. Her countenance was quite firm and showed no suspicion of uneasiness. Wayfer kept as much command over himself as he was able.

‘Are you at liberty, Miss Sulby? will you dance with me?’

‘I must not dance any more, thank you. I am quite tired.’

She had had one turn with Mr. Kimble, since that with the man of law.

‘Just one round,’ urged Wayfer. ‘I have not had one with you.’

‘I am too tired. I should not have danced at all if Mr. Kimble had not made me.’

‘I have looked forward all night to having one with you. There is no other partner worth dancing with.’

‘That at any rate is not true, and you have no right to say it.’

Ruth’s colour rose with her resentment.

‘It is quite true, whatever you say. If I had known that you would not have danced with me, I should not have come at all. I only came to dance with you.’

Ruth restrained her feelings, and looked

into the man's face with firmness. She spoke calmly.

‘Mr. Wayfer, you know what I think of such statements from you and yet you continue to make them. If you do not know how to behave to others, I can at least tell you how you are to behave to me, and if you have any spark of gentlemanly—no, mere manly feeling you will attend to it. You have no right to use such words to me. You have no right to incessantly annoy me as you do. Having once told you that your attentions are distasteful to me, you ought to know that it is ungentlemanly to thrust them upon me whenever you find an opportunity. It becomes insulting; and there is little credit in insulting a woman who has no means of effectually resenting it. Had I such means, you would not dare to do it. It is because I am alone that you persecute me. You had better engage in some worthier employment.’

Thereupon Ruth turned her back upon her admirer, and almost walked into the arms of Joice Radway. The latter's face betrayed that she had overheard them, and she turned slowly to follow after the school-mistress. Wayfer strolled away in another direction.

Miss Sulby was directing her footsteps to the corner whence the doorway gave an exit from the granary. She was oblivious of her promise to Mr. Philpin, indeed of all save the quiet of her own room. She wished that she could have sunk into this by some miracle, without the physical effort of walking thither. Joice kept quite close at her heels.

By the very greatest good fortune, Mr. Kimble was absent from the assembly, so that Ruth escaped without any difficulty. An encounter with the boisterous humour of the farmer would have vanquished her at this moment, so strong was the tension upon her nerves. In fact, the gentlest

touch might have done so, like a finger upon the vibrating bell-metal. She reached the open air without having suffered such contact, and in a few seconds she had grown calmer.

Ruth, however, had not made her escape unnoticed. Mr. Philpin had had his eye fixed upon her, although he was engaged with another partner, and he had seen the sudden dismissal of Wayfer. It was impossible for him not to view it with pleasure, but immediately he began to tremble for himself. Miss Sulby had disappeared at that fatal corner.

He felt that there was not an instant to be wasted, but he was fully equal to the occasion. His partner was abandoned with scant ceremony, and he himself shot directly across the ring. In his eagerness he came in contact with a heavy couple, who came revolving with the solidity of a sphere, and an unlooked-for catastrophe was the result. Mr. Philpin rebounded

from the collision, being incomparably the lighter of the agents, and lay prostrate in the middle of the floor. He was at once surrounded by a sympathetic, if laughing, group, all eager to offer assistance, for the good-humoured gentleman had made himself a general favourite. He was found to have suffered no injury, and he turned his accident to a joke. His eye-glass alone had been broken.

If Joice had not followed Miss Sulby from the assembly, it is possible that poor Philpin's hopes would have been frustrated. When he got out into the rick-yard he would undoubtedly have lost his way there, and very likely would have found himself in the green duck-pond. He was by no means familiar with the locality, and the moon was already near setting. He hesitated when he stepped out into the darkness, and exclaimed, with some bitterness,—‘I have missed her! Oh, grant me thy ray, gentle Luna!’

As his eyes grew accustomed to the obscurity, he could distinguish the objects around him. There was something moving there, about ten yards off, and towards it he strode with impetuosity.

‘Miss Sulby!’ he cried, at the top of his voice.

The movements stopped.

‘Why, it is Mr. Philpin!’ exclaimed Ruth to her companion, and the breach of her promise flashed upon her.

‘Yes, it is,’ cried the gentleman, vehemently, immediately recognising the voice of his charmer.

They stayed for him to come up to them, which he was not long in doing.

‘My dear Miss Sulby, you——’

‘I am so grieved, Mr. Philpin, that I should have forgotten. It really was quite unintentional. I left suddenly in a state of confusion.’

This apology made ample amends, being said in so earnest a voice. Indeed, Mr.

Philpin, when he came to think over it afterwards, gave thanks for the incident that had occasioned it. He felt the sweet sound of it now, and could hardly conceal his transport.

‘Miss Sulby, you make me most happy.’

Ruth requested Joice to accompany them, and the three set off towards the school. The third was not exactly to Mr. Philpin’s taste, but he recognized the happiness of even small mercies. He talked just as if Joice were not there, so eager was he to avail himself of the occasion.

The gate was, of course, reached much too soon, and Mr. Philpin must take his farewell. He lingered for some seconds before going, although Ruth had withdrawn quickly her hand from the warm pressure which he was anxious to bestow. She and Joice were already at the doorway, when Mr. Philpin again summoned Ruth to him. He put his face over the railings

and she stood within a reasonable distance.

‘ You did receive the newspaper, Miss Sulby ? ’ he said, in a tremulous whisper.

‘ O, yes. Did you send it ? Did you mark it ? ’

‘ Yes—yes, and *I wrote it.* ’

Mr. Philpin had made the confession which had been trembling upon his tongue all the evening, and he then took his departure to the granary.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DREGS.

MICHAEL WAYFER was not a very sensitive mortal, so that he did not feel the sting of Ruth's reproof as some others might have done. It had simply made him immeasurably angry, and subsequently immeasurably reckless. He went directly from the interview to the beer barrels, and tried to drown his chagrin in a cup or two. In a short time he was in a better humour, at least judging from his outward appearance, and he was seeking for a more amenable partner. He had but little difficulty in the quest, there being only too many eager to receive him. Soon he grew positively playful with the girls.

Mr. Philpin also was in highest feather and in very great favour with everybody. During an interval in the dancing, he even gave the company a song, which was received with uproarious acclamation. There were others emboldened by his example, and this diversion in the entertainment became frequent.

It was already a good hour after midnight, and Mr. Kimble and his party had long since left. All present were giving themselves more unreservedly to gaiety, were resorting more frequently to Mr. Clinkscapes. This gentleman offered open arms to everybody, being as yet only in the highest state of hilarity. Like all well-regulated toppers, Mr. Clinkscapes went through properly defined gradations. From the argument of comparative sobriety, he advanced by rapid strides to disputation; curiously, to this succeeded unreasonable hilarity, which was again to be displaced by comprehensive if some-

what incoherent abuse; from this he drifted speedily to finis.

Mr. Philpin paid but small attention to the liquor; he had come solely for spiritual enjoyment, and he had found it in quite an unexpected degree. When he saw in what direction things were tending, he felt that it was time for his departure. He was not averse, however, from partaking of a stirrup-cup, so he directed his steps towards the barrels for that purpose. He found some little difficulty in getting near them.

From the noisy laughter which proceeded from the throng in that corner, it was evident that something particularly enjoyable was engaging general attention. Mr. Philpin pushed his way forward by degrees, and presently got a view of the proceedings. Two or three youths had laid hands upon Clinkscapes, and were in the act of raising him bodily from the ground.

‘Is he drunk?’ asked Philpin of a sage-looking by-stander.

‘Noa; Master Clinkscales can hold a vast o’ drink. ’Em be a-going to put un on the barrel.’

So Mr. Philpin observed as he watched them. The Mayor was on the point of being enthroned. It was a picture to which only a Teniers could do justice. There was Mr. Clinkscales sitting astride the cask, with young men upon each side for supporters. The right hand one none other than Michael Wayfer, for it was he who had first suggested the prank. The Mayor, as all voices now called him, was quite overcome by his laughter. His head rolled irresponsibly about his shoulders, and moisture trickled freely from his eyes. His overhanging moustachios were matted together with liquor, a drop occasionally falling to his waistcoat. He broke from time to time into an audible giggle, that inordinately vacuous giggle

of incipient intoxication. It proved irresistibly infectious to his audience, and many had to hold their sides and lean forward. Several times Mr. Clinkscales held out his hand as if to address them, but he was constantly overcome by his giggle.

‘Take your time, Master Mayor, an’ it ’ll come,’ cried a particularly sympathetic member of the throng.

Another handed him a pint pot of liquor, which exercised the desired influence. He held it without spilling any great quantity, and very soon had subdued his fit of laughter. He looked down with gravity at the assembly.

‘Now, boys,’ he said. ‘I can thank you ; thank you—for the honour you have done me. Proudest moment of my life, as the saying is.’

‘Hear, hear!’ issued from somebody not far off.

‘Who said “hear, hear”?’ cried the

orator, with a sudden movement which upset much of the beer. 'Skunk! Do you deny it? He daren't show himself. He——'

'Go on!' said Wayfer.

'Proudest moment of my life, as I was saying when that low-bred Tory attacked me. But before I make a speech, friends, I—I want to propose a toast; so all of you get ready the liquor. I propose the health of Mr.—Mr. Bradlaugh, the President of our Republic!'

'No politics!' cried somebody at the back of the crowd. 'I propose Mr. Kimble.'

Clinkscapes had his face hidden by the pint pot at the moment, but heard the words which had been spoken. Nobody else had made any response to the first toast which had been proposed.

'Eess, us 'll drink to Mr. Kimble,' exclaimed many voices at once.

The Mayor looked upon them with anger.

‘Is there opposition to my toast? Don’t you know your friends, people?’

‘Come on, we’ll drink Bradlaugh!’ was the reply, in tones very like those of Wayfer. It was taken up by the boldest of the youths, and Bradlaugh became the cry. Clinkscals waxed warm under it.

‘I should think you will drink to Bradlaugh,’ he cried, rolling over towards Wayfer; ‘the greatest man—this cent’ry has prodooed. Who was that talking o’ no politics? Let him come forward if he dare. Isn’t politics the chief-concern of working men? Isn’t it that as is to make ’em free? Speak now, I’m open to discussion. Nobody can say that I’m biassed——’

‘Only to th’ drink, Master Clinkscals.’

‘Nobody can say that I am biassed,—damn it, turn that blackguard out! While I sit here I have the right to address you. I am elected by the voice of the people. Vox populi vox dei, as the saying is. But

I am getting away from the point. I asked who it was that opposed Bradlaugh. Nobody dare give an answer. I tell you he's the man that 'll put the world into order. He's the man that 'll give the power to the people.'

'Drink the health of Master Kimble!'

'Mr. Kimble's the greatest enemy you have. He keeps you all in your slavery—'

'Nay, drap that!' cried many of the elders.

'He is one of the thieving capitalists,—one of the highway robbers. How has he got his thousand acres? By robbing all you of yours. But for Kimble I should be a rich man. You would all of you be rich men. Divide up his farm amongst you, and you'll get a score acres each. Is he a friend to you that keeps you from it? Are you born to make the money for him?'

'Whose is the drink as you be a-sitting on?'

‘Drink that has been stolen from you, and it’s about the worst that ever I tasted.’

Mr. Clinkscales had store of such rant within him, and he continued to pour it forth abundantly. It offered diversion to those around him. One sane onlooker at least was there present who did not seem to appreciate the scene, and this was our simple-minded friend, Mr. Philpin. He relinquished his intention of having ale when he saw what was the condition of its president. He was very genuinely disgusted at the spectacle, and enraged at the tenor of the remarks made. He strode away with clouded visage to the musicians. He had struck up quite a friendship with Giles Radway. Giles was just preparing to take his departure, having handed over his fiddle to a younger man who was willing to sit out the requirements of the company.

‘‘St think o’ toddling home, Mr. Philpin?’

‘It’s time for respectable people to be going, Master Radway, after that disgraceful scene going on at the other end ; most disgraceful scene I have ever witnessed. I certainly think it ought to be put a stop to.’

‘Mr. Clinkscapes be a terrible hand for the drink.’

‘But he is trying to raise a bad feeling against Mr. Kimble,’ rejoined Philpin, with increasing indignation. ‘He has got drunk through the kindness of this gentleman, and is now slandering him and the good liquor he has got drunk on. I should like to take proceedings against him. The words could be brought within the statute.’

‘They appear to be getting at variance,’ remarked Radway, as a shout came from the corner referred to. ‘O, cess, I see, Master Jelf have ’em already in hand. Quite a man for deciding a difference be the gardener, Mr. Philpin. A tall man and not easily handled.’

The uproar had now engaged general attention, and all were flocking to the corner whence it issued. Mr. Jelf had been attracted by Clinkscapes' oratory, and had very soon begun to grapple with the situation. He commenced by trying friendly persuasion, but it was at once obvious that that was not going to avail him. It sufficed to draw the politician's anger upon his own head, and a replenished torrent of abuse burst from the beer barrel. Mr. Jelf tried no longer verbal persuasion; he was not a man with an unlimited stock of patience. Silently he elbowed his way through the throng, beckoning two or three others to attend him. Apparently Mr. Clinkscapes partially understood the movements, for in an incapable manner he was trying to divest himself of his coat. His hand was inextricably involved in the sleeve when the gardener came up beside him. Wayfer was unceremoniously shoved from his station, and the clutch of a vice was upon

Clinkscapes. For a moment Wayfer seemed inclined to attempt a rescue, but he was still a quart or two short of decision. The shout was raised as the Mayor was dragged from the barrel to the ground, and immediately a pathway opened out through the crowd for Mr. Jelf to pass through with his victim. The gardener required no assistance until he reached the steps, and then there was plenty at hand. There were but three minutes between the enthronement and the rick-yard where Mr. Clinkscapes was comfortably deposited. It was there that the next daylight was to find him.

This was, of course, no unexpected incident in the night's diversion, and all went on as usual after it had happened.

Mr. Philpin and Giles Radway, however, took their departure when they had witnessed the settlement of Clinkscapes. They went to the cottage of the latter in order

to engage in a few minutes' sober conversation before exchanging the final farewell. Giles felt very agreeably flattered by this legal gentleman's attention, and perhaps conducted himself somewhat too obsequiously. Giles never liked to presume, and when he reached the door of his cottage his invitation was given with hesitation. .

'Will you be pleased to walk in for a minute or two, sir?'

Mr. Philpin had no hesitation in accepting.

'It be already beyond my bed-time,' remarked Giles, as they entered the cottage door; 'so that a few minutes more or less 'ull make but little odds. You'll not drive home to-night, Mr. Philpin?'

'O, no; I have a bed at the "Harrow," if I get time to make use of it.'

'You may very well say that, sir,' said Giles, with his ready laugh at what seemed to savour of humour. 'Well, Joice, you

shouldn't have sat up for I on no account.'

'I haven't been long here, father. I stayed with Miss Sulby a long time.'

Mr. Philpin's countenance was radiant at once. He had not at first identified Joice as the young woman who had been the third of the party that went to the school-house. He drew his chair close to Joice.

'You will be very fond of Miss Sulby, my dear?'

'Yes, sir, very fond of her. She is very kind to me.'

'Of course,' observed Philpin, more absently. 'Of course; kind to everybody around her. O, womanhood——!'

The apostrophe proceeded no further. Mr. Philpin sometimes began his thoughts aloud.

'And you left her safely in her—at her—by her hearth, Miss Joice?'

'Quite safely, sir.'

'Ah, beautiful! What a pretty picture

you would have made whilst engaged in your consultation ! If I could only have been the dog upon the hearth-rug ! Miss Sulby has a dog, I believe ?’

‘ Yes, sir.’

‘ Dear little creature it must be ! Blessed beyond——But excuse me, Mr. Radway,’ he said, suddenly, altering his tone. ‘ The penalty of poets, Mr. Giles : impressionable, imaginative. That was a deplorable incident we witnessed. The baseness of ingratitude ! “ Blow, blow, thou winter wind ! ” and so forth.’

Mr. Philpin imitated the blast from his own lungs, as though to sweep away Clinkscals from his memory.

‘ I am afraid, too,—very much afraid, —surprised at one of his parentage, Mr. Radway ; I am afraid that Mr. Michael Wayfer——’

The gentleman’s eyes completed the sentence to Giles’s comprehension.

‘I never knew Michael take too much o’ the drink before,’ remarked Giles, shaking his head.

Joice’s eyes rested upon her father for a moment.

‘Bad for one beginning in life. Nothing so injurious to a good name. I always thought him a steady young man; but I have seen very little of him.’

‘Steady as any in the parish, Mr. Philpin, that ur be—have been up to this night, however. But there be some excuse, in a manner, at the harvest dance.’

‘No excuse whatever, Mr. Giles. Never excuse intoxication. No true man can give way to it.’

‘That be uncommon true, after all,’ added Radway, more to himself than to his companion.

Joice displayed great uneasiness during this conversation, trying ineffectually to hide her burning face.

‘It is a cold night to sleep out,’ ob-

served Philpin ; ‘ but I am afraid there are many who will try it.’

The look upon Joice’s face altered at the observation, but neither of the men noticed it. She seemed to pay no further heed to the conversation. In a few minutes, she withdrew to her bed-room. Philpin also soon took his departure.

In the meantime things were progressing in the granary. After the eviction of Clinkscals, order was restored amongst the assembly, and dancing was indulged in as before.

Michael Wayfer, however, sought no partner. He sat moodily over against the barrels, and responded to nobody’s jest. As we know, he had no habitual tendency to drinking, as Giles has already remarked ; but to-night seemed to be the exceptional occasion. He was constantly refilling his mug, and the effect of it was very obvious upon him. His head seemed uncomfort-

ably heavy. He sat supporting it with both his hands, his elbows resting upon his knees. In him inebriation wrought no hilarity. That enthronement of Clink-scales is not inconsistent with this statement: he indulged in that prank quite consciously.

He seemed far enough away from all activity, scarcely conscious of what went on around him. The music and the dancing entered confusedly into his thoughts, no doubt giving them their tendency, although themselves lost sight of in the crowd. There were little profit in attempting to analyze such confusion.

After long sitting in this state of apparent inanition, a change came over the young farmer rather suddenly. There had been no outward cause to excite it, for everybody now took care to avoid him; so that we must attribute it to some inscrutable mechanism of his disarranged mind. From his moping attitude he rose

to his feet, and for a moment looked savagely about him. The dance was proceeding in disorder, as was inevitable at that hour of the morning, and he had some difficulty in steadying his eye to regard it. He succeeded in doing so for about a minute, and then turned his face away with dissatisfaction. As he skirted round the wall of the granary, he did not exchange a single word with anybody. Mr. Jelf overtook him at the doorway, and said something to him in a low voice. At Wayfer's stare he repeated his words more distinctly. The young man shook his head with impatience.

'I am all right,' he said. 'Do you think I am drunk?'

The gardener offered no further interference, but closed the door and re-arranged the curtain which screened it. A lamp was hung outside at the top of the steps which led down into the yard, and for a few seconds Wayfer stood still beneath it. He

then slowly descended to the ground. He seemed to advance cautiously through the darkness, and with a steadier step than was to be expected. As he passed by the rick near the gateway, his eye was drawn to a light moving behind it. It had only been visible for a second, and might possibly have been a deception of his imagination. He paid no heed to the occurrence, for he was collected enough to find a ready explanation. Even if a light had in reality been there, it need cause no surprise upon this occasion.

The cool air seemed at first to revive him, and, now that his eyes were accustomed to the starlight, he went along the road without much difficulty. A good walk, however, yet lay before him.

CHAPTER X.

WAYFER SLEEPS.

THE night was clear and starlight, but the moon had long since sunk beneath that south-western ridge of hills. Joice Radway was sitting at her window, revolving unpleasant thoughts, with no light to aid her but what came from the stars. It was quite sufficient for her to think by. In the face of many conflicting motives, she was endeavouring to plan a right course of conduct, and it is not surprising that she found it a difficult task. It was a case of Feeling holding a debate with Reason, and without the time in which to do it coolly. Joice knew that she must pro-

nounce the decision speedily, else have it pronounced irrevocably for her. Mr. Philpin had been the innocent immediate cause of all this perplexing self-discussion.

A review of all the occurrences of the night, however, offered little matter that was cheering. Her long interview with the school-mistress had caused Joice more disturbance than consolation; to say nothing of those other incidents which had preceded it in the granary. The pleasant dream in which she had undertaken her dancing had been very rudely broken, and she had been left in a more bewildered condition than at any time previously. Of the certainty for which she had sought, she had undoubtedly got possession, and a very uncomfortable acquisition she found it. Towards Miss Sulby, it is true, she felt differently, and was repentant for her former misconstruction; but there was very little consolation in that. It had given back to her a friend full of sympathy; but

is sympathy of any profit save to the one heart which bestows it? Joice had listened most patiently to her friend's advice, and had left her with a determination to act on it: within the very first hour afterwards she was finding how difficult it was to do so.

Joice had miscalculated the strength of her own feelings. Ruth had impressed upon the artless young woman the necessity of inaction; a course, as we know, particularly hard for the one counselled to adopt. She must accept her position patiently, so had the youthful moralist insisted, and bear it with womanly dignity. If Wayfer should persist in his estrangement, then it was proof that he was unworthy to love her. Platitudes as these may sound to very many of us, they were by no means such when addressed to Joice Radway. She had an ardent temperament, not brought under restraint by conventional training, although owning true

allegiance to broad womanly instinct. Fortunately her nature was lofty, so that her mistakes would be childlike and venial.

Harsh words or indifferent treatment from Michael Wayfer could not affect Joice's feelings towards him. Her outward behaviour to him it might, for a rebuff to any action on her part caused her torture; but of pride she had little more than a faithful dog. She thought as kindly of him, therefore, to-night as she had ever done, and would have sacrificed herself for his welfare. Joice's face flushed whenever the thought of his present condition occurred to her. Mr. Philpin had stated that he had drunk too much, and her father had acquiesced. Bitterly could she feel the shame of it, and she would have hidden him; but the danger also she felt. The road to Sedgecomb was an awkward one, ugly hints had been passed as to his sleeping out of doors. To bring the matter more vividly before her im-

agination, an incident of but a week ago would cling to her most tenaciously. A man in an adjoining parish, when returning home in the condition referred to, had perished in a ditch. The inquest was in the paper, and the coroner had drawn a moral which Joice had little thought could concern her. It concerned her desperately to-night. But *he* must not run the risk, she herself would go secretly and protect him. It was the first time he had ever done it, and even her father, rigid as he was upon the drink topic, had excused him; she herself could of course doubly do so. For a single fall, his life must not be endangered. He should live to undo it; he was not like those creatures who rose up before her as she contemplated the subject of drunkenness: he never could be.

This prompt decision in the hesitating thinker came almost immediately upon the closing of her father's bed-room door. The

old man retired after the departure of Mr. Philpin, and Joice knew that after the exertions of the night there was little fear of his being wakeful. Without the smallest difficulty she could escape, and all her nature urged her to it : she delayed but a few minutes longer.

When silence pronounced her father at rest, Joice moved away from the window. Her out-door garments were speedily put on, and her shoes removed from her feet ; then she stole silently down-stairs. Taking an old tin lantern from a cupboard, she lit the candle inside and put the box of matches in her pocket. Yet a few seconds she listened at the foot of the stairs ; but there was no sound to disturb her. The key of the outer door seemed to make a great noise in being reversed in the lock, but in reality it was nothing : nobody else had heard it. The wind moaned angrily round the house as Joice left it, and she drew her shawl more tightly around her.

It was a beautiful night, though dark.

She hurried up the road, which here began a gradual ascent, and she was soon beside the school-house. All there was dark and still. A short distance beyond, Joice came in view of the light which hung at the granary door, the ray of which seemed to span the whole space between the barn and herself. At sight of this she extinguished her lantern and then quickened her pace. Somebody passed her with shuffling steps, but it was neither his figure nor gait. She escaped onwards unobserved, and was very soon safe in the rick-yard.

Long did she lean with her shoulder against that straw rick and her eyes fixed upon the lamp above the door. She could easily distinguish anybody coming out from thence, and was herself quite secure against detection. More than an hour she stayed there, shivering with cold and trembling with nervousness; and yet he did not appear. As the minutes advanced,

a fresh fear possessed Joice. Was it possible that he had gone before her arrival at the place? This doubt was quite sickening, and very nearly subdued her. The danger, however, was of short duration. The door was again opened, and Wayfer stood in the lamplight.

Yes, he stood there alone, upright and steady. How wickedly they had wronged him! He was as sober as any of them. How else could he descend so securely those steep steps?

As he began to descend them, Joice fled round the straw rick, and quickly put a match to her lantern. She was scarcely yet conscious of what she intended to do. She came out from her hiding-place, but quickly drew backwards. He must surely have seen her! She was vexed at her own clumsiness. Again the light was extinguished.

Wayfer had caught a glimpse of the lantern, and had stopped for a moment;

but as we know he had quickly passed onwards. Joice could hear his slow footsteps when he was out in the road, and then she ventured to come forth. As he went on down the village, she kept a short distance behind him, screening herself by the shade of the wall and watching his every footstep. She thought he occasionally stumbled, but then she did the same. Anybody must stumble when walking in the night time.

They had got about half way through the village when further self-deception was impossible. Joice's heart sank as she watched him: their report had been true. Once or twice she darted forward, but as suddenly drew back. How was it possible to help him? At any rate she could watch him, and this she continued to do. She might save him from any serious calamity, such as she now saw might very possibly befall him. They were as yet only by the village green, the worst part of the road

was to come. But he had taken the right turn ; that was a difficulty removed.

Joice had taken it, too, and was standing still in the roadway. Her eyes were fixed upon the hill slope, quite regardless of her charge. She was watching what appeared to be a curious phenomenon. It was but a short distance away from her, and yet she could not conceive what it was. She knew that the fields upon her left hand formed a ridge on the hill slope, and that just beyond them was the farmhouse of Michael Wayfer. Trees and hedgerows were black, and so was the hill-top where the stars ended. All around was dark, save for that strange light amongst the elm trees, in that one particular spot. It was not a fixed light, like a lamp in a cottage window ; only a dull uncertain glare stretching from earth to sky. Trunks and branches were before it, standing like sombre giants. As Joice watched it, filled with awe and fear, the

wind blew briskly by her and gave her the explanation she wanted. As she drew in a breath through her nostrils, she muttered with a shudder :

‘ It is fire.’

The explanation brought her anything but relief. A thrill of horror passed through her, as she pictured the scene. Awful enough in the day, but terrible in the extreme during the night. Joice’s imagination was quick, so that she was impressed by the picture to the full. She could see all the details of the spectacle, for she had witnessed one fire in her life. But whence could this fire be proceeding? That question agitated her at once, without her being able to find an answer. Could it—? But no, it seemed to be in the position of the coppice ; the wood though could hardly be on fire. It might be, on second thoughts ; Joice had read in a book of such things.

Terror banished all lighter considerations,

and she decided to hurry on to Wayfer. As she looked for his figure in the road, a sound attracted her attention. It was a horse trotting quickly through the darkness and evidently in her own direction. She had the presence of mind to put a light to her lantern, and then ran forward to look for Wayfer. He lay stretched at full length across the road. The horse's steps were rapidly approaching, so that Joice was nervous for his safety, forgetful of the protection of her light. She dropped the lantern, to the ground, and seized the young farmer by the shoulders. Her strength was not equal to the task, so she immediately desisted from the effort to remove him, and stood upright with the lantern in her hand. The horseman was that instant upon her. The horse's hoofs flashed fire as he drew up, and a voice exclaimed loudly,

‘Wayfer’s ricks be a-fire? Who bist?’

‘This is Wayfer here in the road,’ cried

Joice, as distinctly as she was able. 'Move him, move him!'

The man saw at once the situation, and alighted to drag Wayfer into the hedge bottom. Joice seized the bridle of the horse.

'Be 'em a-dancing yet? Why, it be Joice Radway!'

'Yes, some of them are, but I don't know how many. Is it a bad fire?'

'The ricks o' new hay, and 'tull catch the wheat if 'em beunt sharp about it. There be nobody there.'

'Go—go on, and fetch them. I am all right.'

The man leaped to his horse, and Joice watched the sparks from the hoofs as he departed. Then she drew near to the hedge with her lantern, and looked at the figure which lay sleeping there. She sat down upon the grass beside it, and blew out her light. She could bear up against it no longer; she let her face fall into her hands.

Meanwhile the messenger sped on to the village to arouse the capable population. He stopped first to give information to the policeman, and then went to Mr. Kimble's granary. The news here naturally raised a commotion. There were plenty of young men ready enough to offer assistance and to take part in the enterprise with gusto. A gang was very speedily organized, and they at once set off for the scene of the fire. The horseman rode away to Dormantley to obtain the assistance of a fire engine.

The glare in the sky had grown brighter, and it increased the ardour of the volunteers. The volumes of smoke which rolled along the hillside before the breeze were of course invisible, but all the air was filled with the ominous reek. An element of horror possessed the country where but a few hours before had breathed the very spirit of peace. It was the contrast which made it the more impressive to such

a temperament as that of Joice Radway.

The young woman sat supporting her chin, her elbow resting on her knee and her eyes fixed upon that lurid patch. Her spirit quailed before it. She was revived by that rush of hurrying feet and the uproar of voices coming nearer. Some of the men carried lanterns; she saw them quickly approaching. She was suddenly conscious of her position, and she started to her feet. Not many yards away there was a gate in the hedge; this she scrambled over and crouched down amongst the brambles. She shuddered at their sounds of hilarity as they came rollicking along. Many of them carried buckets to be of service with the water, and in the meantime they made them serve as primitive instruments of music. They were now even with her place of concealment, and must be very near to the sleeping Wayfer. Joice's feelings were at once turned into another channel. They must inevitably see him;

—yes, she heard the announcement of the discovery; the lanterns were upon him; coarse remarks were being made. She could have died for very shame. They were trying to arouse him, but their efforts were in vain. They did not linger long.

When the last of them had left him, Joice rose up from her place and got back into the road. She might have returned to her home for any service she could render, if only her feelings would have allowed her. She was drawn irresistibly after that noisy throng, and she followed them with trembling. They turned off into the fields, slamming the gate behind them, and she too went after. She presently left the direct track and crept cautiously towards the hedge. It seemed very dark, as her eyes were dazzled by the glare of the fire. When she had surmounted the grassy ridge and got to the side of a clump of trees, the blazing ricks burst full upon her view. The angry roar of the flames was audible,

whenever a gust of wind swept over them, and the constant volley of sparks shot far into the darkness. This timid watcher crept onwards still further, and sheltered herself behind the thick trunks of an elm tree.

The fire had evidently got a firm hold of several ricks. Blue and green flames played angrily about the thatch, whilst occasionally large patches were fanned to a massive white heat. The flitting human beings looked ghastly in the glare; the effect being heightened by the indefiniteness of their surroundings. Those trees which were standing near, and of which only the fronts were plainly visible, seemed to draw back into the darkness behind them with affrighted stare at the sight from which they were unable to escape: they looked very literally rooted to the ground with terror. The twigs of the uncut hedge, which stood scarce a yard from the ricks, were all aglow at the leafless tips and shrivelling from the excessive heat,

Even Joice herself could feel the warmth, distant as she was from the spot. The movements of the buckets were visible as they passed along the line of men, and the shouts of those engaged mingled awfully with the roar of the wind and the flames. For a moment Joice turned away, to press her face against the rough bark of the tree which supported her ; but she was suddenly again aroused. A universal shout had rent the air, and she looked eagerly for an explanation.

She gazed intently at the scene, and thought that she perceived a light beyond the limits of the massive ricks ; but again it was invisible ; she held her breath with expectation. The hiss of that bucket of water, which had been handed by the men up the ladder, had not been audible to her, but it had not extinguished the outbreak. After a few minutes of painful excitement, Joice could deceive herself no longer. The fire had taken a stride.

Having tremulously assured herself of this, she could continue there no longer. She raised herself from the trunk against which she had been leaning and fled hastily across the field. She lingered at that spot in the road to grope about in the dark. The sleeping figure was distinguishable; but if the noise of those men had not aroused him what hope for feeble effort of hers. Joice knelt to whisper something in his ear, then proceeded on her way to the village. As she turned the corner in the road by the green, the sound of distant rumbling alarmed her. Her mind was too agitated to prompt an explanation, so that the effect upon her was in no way surprising. Straightway she turned her face up the broad village street and ran as fast as her strength would enable her. Nothing checked her until she stood panting before her father's cottage.

In the meantime that mysterious rumbling came nearer, and lights flashed quick-

ly along the hedges. The scamper of horses now mingled with the sound. There was a halt at the foot of the village, and the clamour of men's voices was audible. The turn was then taken as directed, and Sedgecomb was very soon reached.

The efforts with the water could only be defensive. Joice's fears were but too well founded; the adjacent ricks of wheat had taken fire. The fire had taken such permanent possession by the time that the small engine arrived that the supply of water at their command was helpless against it. All attention was given to the buildings to prevent the conflagration from becoming general. In this their efforts were successful, but day was dawning before they were assured of it.

When Michael Wayfer mounted the green ridge and looked down towards his homestead, the hose was still playing upon the smoked and grimy walls.

CHAPTER XI.

THE AWAKENING.

IT was one of the beautiful mornings of November, mild and spring-like, (for, notwithstanding universal calumny, November, too, has his hours of smiling,) when Wayfer paused upon the green ridge to behold the smouldering remnants of his gathered crops. He stood beside the clump of trees, by which Joice had stood only a few hours before, gazing in silence. His hand was raised to his forehead and carried before his eyes; then he looked again at the stupefying prospect. Was it a continuation, merely, of that drunken night-mare?

A stiff west wind whistled through the black branches above him, branches which looked doubly black against the rosy sky overhead. The range of hills ran in a north easterly direction and the laggard sun had not yet made his appearance above them, although he was giving glorious, if bodeful, evidence of his awakening. The eastern hill-tops were intensely clear, and there was peeping above them a light purple bar of cloud, separated by a narrow strait from the indeterminately-edged patch of roseate mist which rose upwards towards the zenith. Over the expanse of heaven stretched the crimson tresses of Aurora, scattered in divine profusion. The effect of this spectacle upon the view no doubt intensified the impression of which Wayfer was sensible as he stood there, although he was utterly unconscious of there being a sky at all above him. He saw nothing but a smouldering rick-yard.

Presently he ventured to advance,

striding slowly in the direction of the smoke. It did not disappear upon his approach, as he had been half-consciously expecting it to do. The figures about it he could recognize, and they, too, had caught sight of him. Onwards still, until he came up; speech with them was impossible; nobody addressed him. Passing through the farm-yard gate, Wayfer went into the house alone. Various looks were fixed upon him.

‘Well, thee bist a queer un!’ exclaimed one of the men, who had been watching him,—one, too, who had been grappling with the fire since the original alarm was given. ‘Not a word for nobody and us has saved his house from destruction.’

‘Wayfers were ever a queer lot, Martin,’ remarked old Benjamin Hazard, the hedger, ‘to within the stretch o’ my recollection, however; and that be a tidy space o’ years.’

‘That ’em were, Benjamin, I can testy

to that,' interposed another, who looked well begrimed with smoke and water, although apparently well advanced in years. 'I can mind Jonathan's father, when ur was shepherd to Master Kimble,—that were Stephen Kimble, the granfer——'

'Eess, eess.'

'Granfer to the Mr. Kimble as at present be,' he continued, turning his remarks from the impatient elder to those who could not pretend to such a lengthened experience. 'As I were a-saying, I can mind Jonathan's father, they called un Bandy Wayfer; that weren't his right name, of course, but ur always went by it. Ur was grissened Matthew or Mark, I believe, but I yent sure, for ur never got the name as parson gave un——'

'Matthias were his right name as ur was a-grissened by,' interposed Benjamin Hazard.

'Ye 'ev put me right, Benjamin: Matthias it was. It were on account of his

legs as ur got the name Bandy. But to go back. I can mind this Bandy Wayfer, when ur was shepherd, ur was ever a desperd still silent man. I were under-carter's boy at that time, and I'd used to be quite a-feared at un.'

'Ur was a curious man sure enough,' assented Hazard. 'Quite a miser wi' the money an' all. Ur had a coffer by his bed full o' gold, so I heard tell: it were common report, however, in fact. He it were as began to put the Wayfers i' the uppard line. But ur 'ud never spend any urself. O, no! Ur left all the more for Jonathan o' course.'

'But beunt ur a-going to give we anything?' asked Martin Stickly. 'If us had all been drunk as ur were urself, the whole barton and the beasts an' all ud ha' perished; udn't 'em, Stephen Oates?'

'That 'em would, Martin. Then these ingine men ull want something, afore 'em gwoes back to Dorm'tley. Why, here be

Peter Rule a-coming over the hill. Peter yent a man to come over soon if there be work a-stirring.'

'I be a-going to see what 'em purpose doing,' remarked Stickly, who had had no thought of expending labour gratuitously in saving another's property. Accordingly he went across towards the men in charge of the fire-engine.

Before Martin had reached his destination, however, he heard a voice calling him by name from the farm-yard. He looked quickly enough and saw Michael Wayfer himself standing there.

'What time did you come here?' asked Wayfer.

''Tweren't much arter two o'clock, Master Wayfer.'

'Were you with the first?'

'Yes, I handled the very first bucket,' was the reply, given with alacrity.

'Tell one of the fire-men to come here to me.'

There was another short consultation with him, and then Wayfer returned once more into the house. During the short interview, however, he had led Martin Stickly to modify his opinion of him, by giving him a substantial sum to share with his comrades. The firemen were equally satisfied. In giving the money Wayfer had stated that he should supply no food or liquor upon his own premises, so that, as soon as they were satisfied as to the safety of the place, he hoped they would all withdraw to the village. They soon had satisfied themselves upon this matter, having in fact done so shortly before the arrival of the farmer; but it was deemed expedient to occupy themselves on the spot until his appearance.

The flow of conversation was kept up to a very surprising degree on the return journey to the village. The company had naturally separated into groups of three or four, and each detachment was occupied

with its own peculiar topic. Everyone offered its particular points of interest; but let us walk with this handful of elders, whose converse is the least voluble, and who ought to impart through it a maximum of rugged wisdom, if grey hairs be any warrant for this commodity. Even Giles Radway was amongst them, having arrived upon the scene but a minute after Peter Rule; but he seemed to walk for the most part in silence. It was Peter's own voice that was at this moment addressing his companions.

‘I can't see no good in it, Benjamin,’ he was saying; ‘not no how. I were talking with Mr. Clinkscles but a day or two back, the day afore yesterday, in fact, when I looked into the “Harrow,”—it were the day after Master Yarnold's fire—and we couldn't come no agreement about it. Of course, I beunt no hand at the learning, never was from a boy; but dost think as the intelleck 'ev much to do with a right

understanding o' these concerns, Master Radway ?'

'In my judgment, Peter,' replied Giles, being thus directly referred to; 'in my judgment, learning and the intelleck be two diverse affairs. Mr. Clinkscals have considerable abilities, far beyond the like o' we, of course, in most respects; but concerning some items I can't think as ur be altogether right. I wish no disrespect to anybody, very far from it, it beunt my place to judge what be right or wrong in anybody 'cept myself; but, as I may say to you, it do appear to me as though the learning o' Mr. Clinkscals be more considerable than his intelleck. To answer your question, however, Peter, I may say as I think any Christian man may judge o' these things without his being anything of a scholar—or only in a very small way, however.'

'That be just as I think it,' said Peter.

'But Master Clinkscals yent a Gristin,'

cried out Stephen Oates, who was one of the outside men of the four, 'I heard un declare that on Saturday night at the "'Arrow" long since.'

Radway shook his head with gravity.

'Of course not,' added Hazard. 'I 'ev heard un becall the parsons sky-high an' all.'

'But a Gristin man may do that, Benjamin,' said Oates, possibly with some view to self-justification.

'They tell me as there beunt no Gris-tins in the towns; is that like to be true?'

'In some measure, I be afeared,' replied Radway, to whom the query had been put. 'Mr. Gabriel Bewglass have told me strange tales, however.'

'But, Gristin or no Gristin, there be a power o' truth in Master Clinkscapes' words,' suggested Oates.

'I can't agree with 'e, Stephen.' Rule was the speaker. 'Certainly ur spoke

the truth in saying as there ud be more fires than Master Yarnold's, but I could ha' said that myself before I'd had my ale. But it beunt truth as us ought all to be uncontented, and that be what Master Clinkscals says.'

'Right, Peter, right.'

'But 'e beunt right,' asserted Oates. 'See what wages 'em gets in the towns. Why dunt 'em give we the same?'

'Us hasn't the same abilities at things as them in the towns,' suggested Peter Rule.

'I 'unt believe that ; that I 'unt. I 'ev seed they men from the towns a time or two, and bless 'e, they 'ev no notion o' thatching a rick or clipping a sheep no more 'an that mound.'

'That yent their calling, you see, Stephen,' interposed Benjamin Hazard.

'And concerning wages,' said Radway, 'it be difficult to judge. For some things beunt so cheap in towns. Considering all

things, you can get more for sixpence in the country than 'e can for a shilling in the towns, Mr. Bewglass have told me that.'

'I believe as there be some truth in that, too,' said Rule. 'Them have no gardens an' all, and rents be dear.'

'Well, anyhow, I 'ud rather have twenty shillings than ten,' grumbled Stephen Oates.

'Eess, o' course,' replied Peter. 'But 'st thinks as e'll get it by burning ricks?'

'I a'nt burned no ricks, mun, no more 'an ye 'ev yourself. I comed to try and put her out though, and that be more 'an 'e did. Nobody be i' the right but Peter Rule i' this parish.'

'Dunt have no difference, Stephen,' interposed the pacific Radway. 'Peter didn't mean as e'd burned ricks yourself, o' course.'

'They tell me as Master Wayfer beunt

issured. Ur med well look glum,' said Hazard.

'Eeh! Be that the case? Well, well! There must ha' been near fifty tons of hay.'

'Iss, more than that, I'll warr'nd 'e. And ur had the best grain i' the parish this year. I heard Mr. Kimble urself saying so at the harvest time. 'Tull be a desperd loss for un.'

'That it 'ull. Beunt 'e a-coming to the "Arrow," Benjamin Hazard?' cried out Oates, as he turned off at the village corner.

'Noa, I'll get whum.'

The companions had nearly all separated at this corner, the majority of the members, however, had gone in the direction of the 'Harrow Inn.' Peter and Giles kept company for some distance further, when they also parted. The latter returned to his cottage to speak with his anxious

daughter before going up the hill to his road work. He found Joice standing in the doorway eagerly awaiting him.

In the meantime, Michael Wayfer also had his occupation. When he had dismissed the men in the manner we have seen, he withdrew to his bed-room. He watched from his window the last of them disappear over the green ridge; then for some time there was a mighty splashing of water. In a quarter-of-an-hour he issued from his doorway a new man. His face had assumed its usual fresh coloured appearance, and he was dressed in his ordinary working clothes. As he stepped into the farm-yard his dogs ran forward to greet him, and he actually found a word to bestow upon them. He passed on to the burning ricks.

This man's face was susceptible of but little betrayal of feeling, beyond the obvious markings of anger. These were

hardly to be traced there upon the present occasion. There could be no longer doubt as to his having grasped the reality of the scene before him, and of his having assumed some very definite attitude towards it. His property was gone, and he was fully conscious of the fact that he had delayed the insurance too long. Popular conjecture upon this point proved to be quite accurate. Those smouldering heaps represented the ashes of so many bank notes, and at the same time a very substantial proportion of the year's rent.

We cannot attribute Wayfer's apparent strength of attitude to sheer indifference to the loss. He was not in a pecuniary position so to regard it. The young man knew what his loss meant at the first moment of realizing it. A considerable hole must be made in his small reserve fund by this unlooked-for casualty; a consequence almost wholly the result of his own gross negligence. Yes, he knew it;

recognised it fully at the first instant. He was not dismayed by it.

How far he was affected by the knowledge of his own ignominious position during the progress of the catastrophe there was little or nothing to show. It is not likely that he passed it over in unconcern; for he, in common with all the remembered Wayfer family, was reputed to be endowed with a more unreasonable share of pride than the majority of his neighbours. The Wayfers had never shared the failings of their kind, the failings at least which had any savour of sensuality; and this young Michael had earned for himself a certain notoriety by this single display of intemperance. It was the first instance of the kind in his family within the limits of the recorded memory of Shipcombe.

Wayfer did not stay long to regard the ruin of his rick-yard. Two farm boys were standing there to represent the

labourers in his employment; the men having withdrawn with the body of those who had been active in resisting the fire. When these lads had been put to some occupation in the stables, the master set off for his daily perambulation of the acres under his charge. His two dogs bounded on before him.

Since sunrise the wind had been steadily on the increase, and it was now threatening to develop into a gale. It was a very salutary state of the atmosphere for one in Wayfer's particular frame of mind. His stalwart form showed only the slightest inclination forwards, but the flapping of his unbuttoned jacket spoke more plainly of the atmospheric force with which he was contending. The clouds had now risen and overspread the whole sky; their billow-like ridges of grey, which sped onwards from the Bristol Channel, threw the country into shade and seemed to intensify the clearness of the horizon beneath them.

The bold range of the Malvern hills and the more distant peaks of Wales stood in sombre blue against the lighter background. The country between looked naked, but was not without its peculiar charm to any bold enough to look November in the face. Villages and church towers were visible, which half the year were buried beneath green clouds of foliage; wood-land and hedgerow were black, interspersed with the dull stubble field and pasture.

Wayfer was not at any time very sensible of the attractions of nature, so that it was hardly to be expected of him now. He was ascending the hill in his walk, and had already crossed that large broken pasture-land, (with the solitary oak tree in the centre towards which the cattle drew,) the slope of which was studded with rusty bracken and tufts of furze under whose shelter still lingered a chance tottering harebell or a cloud-like head of yarrow.

Beyond this field was a goodly coppice, and at the stile which gave entrance to this enclosure the young farmer stopped, resting his hand upon the topmost rail.

That he was deep in meditation was very obvious ; but there was little to give indication of its tendency. He was presumably not listening to the wind howling through the wood, nor to its fierce rustling through the dry brown leaves of those stubborn young oaks and elms ; his eyes were not fixed upon any of the flowers or hedgerow berries which were scattered not unplentifully around him. By his very elbow was a large hawthorn tree, all ruddy with its load of haws : from it, along the margin of the coppice, ran a good hundred yards of miscellaneous dainties worthy to be compared with the gaudy profusion of summer. From amongst the hoary beard of November,—those grey seed-feathers of the wild clematis,—swayed the long graceful arms of the dog-brier, bearing its pairs

and triplets of coral hips, and the last remnants of its golden leaflets, which were now spinning off one by one before the wind. A twisted wreath of red bryony berries was in places apparent, rising up from the matted undergrowth of the ditch. Tasteless blackberries were there in abundance.

There were flowers, too, of various kinds, for although November does not give great heed to his garden, nevertheless he has one of a kind. Had Wayfer been sentimentally inclined, he could have gathered a goodly nosegay for his lady. The hedge-bottom champions, white and pink, still stood erect above the bright-eyed herb-robert geranium: a tall Canterbury-bell which had strayed from the coppice; the white and purple eyebright, with the little downy hawkweed, lingered by that barren patch where the stony subsoil broke through its thin covering of grass. Daisies and buttercups were still in the grass; yarrow

and harebell; but they were all invisible to Wayfer.

After standing for several minutes by the stile, with the wind rushing boisterously about him, the man was aroused from his cogitation by a slap upon the face from an oak leaf. The wind had torn it from the bough in desperation and had taken some inches of the twig along with it. It made Wayfer's cheek tingle, and he brushed his hand hastily across the place. He exclaimed aloud immediately after,

‘I am a fool; but I’ve done with it. She can go to the devil for me.’

Therewith he crossed the stile and took the pathway through the coppice. His dogs had taken licence during his fit of abstraction, and he could now hear them yelping with eagerness in the chase somewhere deep in the brushwood. Some whistling and stern shouting of their names at length brought them panting to his

heel, where they continued to walk, not without sidelong glances, until they reached the top of the wood. They were the first to bound into the pasture, which formed the summit of the hill and was not inaptly called Cold-Comfort, and, when their master again bawled after them, the terrier began to bark and paid no heed to the call.

When Wayfer had followed into the field, he saw the cause of the dog's disquiet: a figure was coming in their direction which the young man immediately recognized as that of Mr. Kimble. The former's face displayed an expression of annoyance. In a minute or two they met.

'This is a bad job, Wayfer,' said Mr. Kimble, in a short business-like way. 'Insured, I suppose?'

'It is a bad job; but it's done and can't be helped,' said Wayfer, doggedly.

'Is there any track of the scoundrels?'

Do you think it 'll be the same as did Yarnold's?

'I don't know. They're never found out.'

Wayfer did not face Mr. Kimble as he spoke to him, and moreover he seemed to be under some restraint. The latter showed no reflection of the feeling: he appeared monarch of all he surveyed. The two never pretended to be anything more than neighbourly, but Wayfer hardly sustained even this footing to-day.

'Now I've met you, we might as well settle that other affair,' said Mr. Kimble. 'Have you thought anything more about it? They're coming down on us for the money.'

'I have thought about it,' was the reply. 'I don't see that I am responsible.'

Mr. Kimble looked sharply in his face.

'Not responsible, man! What the deuce do you mean by that? Didn't your father admit that he had the money?'

‘He was nigh his end: he didn’t know what he was talking about.’

Mr. Kimble stared again. This attitude had taken him by surprise. He had never pressed Wayfer for the money because he had always considered it quite safe. This put a different aspect upon the matter.

Mr. Kimble was the acting executor of the late vicar, Mr. Bewglass, as has doubtless been already surmised, and upon him devolved the unpleasant business arising out of the dilapidation question. It was upon this topic that the conversation now turned. That parting injunction of old Wayfer to his son had, as we know, been a thorn in the side of the latter; but he had not until to-day seriously resolved to act upon the advice of his friend Clinkscapes. This was part of the result of his contemplation in the wind; and was perhaps one of the consequences of the loss of his ricks. It was natural for him, at any rate, to consider his own pecuniary position first, and to

escape from all responsibilities which there was no likelihood of having enforced upon him by aid of the law. Perhaps also another more personal consideration was not without its weight in his meditations.

‘Come, come, Wayfer,’ said Mr. Kimble once more, still unable to accept these appearances for reality: ‘I want to talk seriously. You don’t mean to say that you really doubt your father’s sanity. You know quite well that he had the money.’

‘I know nothing of the sort,’ replied the other. ‘He was always grumbling about the buildings, and if he had had the money I know he ’ud ha’ laid it out.’

There could be no mistake about the attitude, and Mr. Kimble was obliged to recognize it. He was a man of a very pronounced temper, and an incident of this sort was just the thing to arouse it. His eyes were once more fixed upon the man before him, and an angry expletive escaped his lips.

‘ We’ll see about that,’ he exclaimed, as he turned and took his departure.

Wayfer inspected his sheep in this field, then strode away towards a gate in the hedgerow. He passed through it into a stubble field beyond, and from there began again to descend the hill.

It was long before he again reached his house. When he did so he found those black and white heaps of ashes still smouldering as when he had left them. There were clusters of idlers around them, who had come out of curiosity to view the scene of the disaster, and it was at them that the master scowled. One drew forward to meet him, not regarding that stern look of discouragement. It was a little man, red-faced, grey-whiskered and black-coated: none other than the Mayor of Shipcombe.

The reception which he met with would have daunted the spirit of most men: but Clinkscles made a point of never being disconcerted by appearances.

Having been checked so deliberately in his opening, he merely followed his friend in silence through the farm-yard, and would have entered the house in his company. To this, however, Wayfer objected.

‘ You can’t come in now,’ he said, without facing his companion.

‘ Tut, tut : just a few minutes’ sociable discourse. It’ll take off——’

‘ I don’t want you, I tell you ; so you can go.’ There was no mistaking this tone.

Wayfer disappeared through the doorway, and Clinkscale re-crossed the farm-yard.

All the afternoon was the young farmer engaged about his premises, the men having returned to their work shortly after mid-day. His face showed less spirit than in the morning, when he had battled with the wind on the high lands ; but it still bore the same aspect of determination. He exchanged word with nobody, beyond

the delivery of any necessary order, which was given in the curtest manner possible. He seemed to revive as the day was closing. About sunset he was even humming a tune as he stood at the door of the cowhouse.

The wind had sunk in some measure, and there was a rift in the deepening grey curtain overhead which gave a glimpse of the blue space beyond with the rosy-tinted cirri stretched before it. The gap closed again in a short time, and when that coloured streak had disappeared from the western horizon the sullen short-lived twilight was ready to give place to night. Then Wayfer crossed over to the house.

It was quite dark when he was again abroad: he was on his way to the village. He walked steadily forward at his usual even pace, not staying until he reached Giles Radway's cottage. There he found Joice alone.

CHAPTER XII.

ROSE COTTAGE.

AFTER the casual encounter of Mr. Kimble and Wayfer, in the field known as Cold-Comfort, the former had ridden over to Dormantley to consult his lawyer. He had returned in a state of great dissatisfaction. On his return journey, he called at a picturesque cottage which stood at the foot of the village of Shipcombe, by the green, and passed a few minutes there. Then he went about his own vocations.

Later in the day Miss Sulby was a visitor to the same cottage. It was an unpretentious but inviting abode, such as are common enough in the villages of

Gloucestershire. It faced the village green, being separated from the road by a garden enclosed by a low stone wall on the top of which the ivy clustered in places. A trellis-work porch served as a frame to the doorway, and over it was trailing the bare arms of honeysuckle and clematis. From each side of it by the windows, rising up the lichen tinted walls and nearly reaching the gable points above the bed-room windows, were tall-climbing rose trees, bearing still two or three blossoms near the top, and naked branches of virginia-creeper. The roof was still tiled with the original old stone slabs, which were even more richly lichened than the walls already referred to. The gateway in the ivied wall opened on to a smooth yellow gravel path which cut in two the well-kept lawn. On each side in the centre grew a hoary gnarled old apple tree, with a flower bed before it and behind. The syringa bush at the corner by the doorway was in a

very bare and straggling plight; but the laurustinus, which was its neighbour, bore masses of opening buds amongst its shining dark green leaves. This was the dwelling-place of Mrs. Bewglass, to which she had removed upon her husband's death.

This lady much affected the lonely young school-mistress, and the two consequently passed many a quiet evening together. The elder was a homely old lady of widely charitable propensities, who spent most of her time in plain useful needlework for the benefit of her more unfortunate neighbours. Her husband had been the vicar of Shipcombe for upwards of forty years, some thirty of which had this lady spent in his company; and by sheer force of unaffected good nature the pair had endeared themselves to the people under their charge to a degree which appears to be becoming daily of rarer occurrence.

Mr. Bewglass would seem to have been

a man of almost culpable disinterestedness, for, although in receipt of the emoluments of a not inconsiderable living during the number of years mentioned, when he died it was found that he left his widow entirely without provision. He had left her a son, it is true, and this was a substantial possession enough in its way,—to his mother, no doubt, far before untold wealth of silver and gold ;—but Mrs. Bewglass had to experience that a few of the pounds which had been year after year so conscientiously dispersed by the vicar would have been a very useful addition to this other bequest.

In many cases, probably, a son such as Gabriel Bewglass would have been equivalent to a moderate sum of gold, for he was an able bodied intelligent man, nearing the age of seven and twenty, who had had opportunities enough of securing for himself a reasonable footing in the business of the world. He had, nevertheless, for

some reason or other failed to do so, and he was still, at the time of which we speak, filling some subordinate post in the legal department of a government office, with a salary of something less than one hundred and fifty pounds a year. There was no apparent reason for this unfortunate condition of things, beyond perhaps the obvious one of his being the son of the Rev. David Bewglass, M.A. Perhaps the father had endowed the son with some of his own unpractical nature, without having left him the means which could alone remedy the deficiency. However, of the son there is no present necessity to speak: he was but a casual visitor to this home of his mother's. He corresponded, of course, frequently with her, and she posted to him regularly every Monday afternoon the previous Saturday's *Dormantley Mirror*.

The twilight was sinking into darkness when Miss Sulby stood before the garden gate. The blinds were not yet drawn, so

that she saw the flickering light of the fire in the room and could distinguish the white cap of the lady by the window. At the sound of the movement of the gate that head in the window had been raised. The door was opened before Ruth reached it, and the visitor was greeted with a kiss.

But they were now sitting comfortably at the tea-table, with shutters closed and thick curtains drawn. The room was cosy and warm, the impression of home-like comfort being heightened by the delicate aroma of toast and tea which pervaded the atmosphere. The soft musical voice of the old lady, who naturally almost monopolized the conversation, harmonized pleasantly with the peace and quiet of the room. The cat was purring zealously upon the hearth-rug, and the flame in the grate gave an occasional whisper: sometimes there was the sound of a tea-cup being replaced in its saucer, and sometimes the pouring out of tea; but all

the sounds only added to the silence.

At last the tea-cosy was allowed to lie idly upon its side at some distance from the tea-pot, so that we may conjecture the meal to be very nearly at an end. Mrs. Bewglass pressed upon Ruth another piece of cake, which was resolutely declined, and then the old lady drank the remainder of her tea.

‘If you have finished, then, Ruth, I will ring;’ and therewith Mrs. Bewglass sounded the little hand-bell which stood upon the table beside her. A prim maid in cap and apron immediately answered the summons. It was at once seen that she was carrying something in her hand.

‘Please, m’m, Mr. Kimble has sent a hare,’—and the animal was held out at arm’s length in unmistakable evidence.

‘What a beauty!’ exclaimed Mrs. Bewglass. ‘Who brought it, Annie?’

‘Peter Rule, m’m.’

‘Is he here now?’

‘No, m’m. He left it on his way home.’

‘You had better hang it up in the back kitchen to-night, but be careful to see that the window is fastened, else the dogs will get in like they did before. Have you locked up the coal-house?’

‘Yes, m’m,’ replied the girl, eagerly, anxious to score a point where she knew what would have been the result if she had given a different answer.

‘You will have to come and help me to eat that, Ruth,’ remarked the lady, with a smile to her companion, as they seated themselves in the arm-chairs. ‘I wish I could send it to poor Gabriel,’ she added the next moment. ‘He will not get many of such things in London. But he begged me not to do so. The partridges I sent him he said were quite wasted, as his landlady cooked them so shamefully. Poor boy!’

The good mother’s exclamation of pity did not arise solely from the thought of

her son's having to go without well-cooked partridge or hare ; the mere mention of his name raised in her mind a very varied assortment of thoughts.

‘I am afraid he is not very happy in that town life, Ruth ; but he will not say anything to me about it.’

Mrs. Bewglass then found that her hands were unemployed, so she immediately rose to get her work-basket. Her knitting was not in it ; a journey therefore to her bed-room was necessary. Ruth surveyed the room until she returned.

The school-mistress was always subdued by a peculiar feeling of enjoyment when she sat in this snug little parlour. Although it was furnished almost as plainly as her own sitting-room, it brought to her an incomparably deeper sense of home. The furniture was old and well handled, and seemed to exhale only the most fragrant reminiscences. There were two large old oil-paintings on the wall, portraits of some

of Mrs. Bewglass's ancestors, and they with their sombre gaze seemed to influence the atmosphere of the place. It was hardly possible that they could have countenanced a noise. A dingy old book-case was in one corner, containing all the books ever possessed by the late clergyman, and his spirit seemed to preside over them still.

After glancing hastily at these sober surroundings, Ruth's eyes were fixed upon the mantel-piece, and they continued to look thither until a footstep was heard upon the staircase. When Mrs. Bewglass glided softly into the room, her visitor was intently regarding the face of the prim old fellow over the sideboard.

'Haven't you brought any work, Ruth?'

'No, Mrs. Bewglass. I thought that I might read to you to-night.'

'Lazy child; always idle with your fingers. I want to talk to you to-night, so that you shall do some sewing for me.'

I have a little frock that you can finish.'

For some minutes both sat silently at their work. Once or twice the elder lady had looked across at her companion, but she did not open her lips. Mrs. Bewglass looked very beautiful as she sat there, busily plying her knitting needles. She looked beautiful, indeed, at all times ; but the lamp-light was especially favourable to her pale pure complexion. Her face was rather long and thin, but perfectly formed in every feature. An old-fashioned widow's cap fringed her forehead from temple to temple, from beneath which peeped the silver hair. With the fulness and colour of youth it must have been a face of particular beauty. Now it suggested contemplation very strongly tinged with the pathetic. They were essentially feminine features, and it was a womanly soul which enkindled them.

When again Mrs. Bewglass looked up, she caught the eyes of her companion upon

her. That look upon Ruth's face seemed to decide her, and she let her knitting fall at once to her lap.

‘I have wanted to speak to you, Ruth,’ the old lady began, with some uneasiness; ‘for you are the only one that I am now able to talk with. I am in very great trouble.’

The school-mistress gave her reply without speech.

‘It will take a little time to explain, but now will be the best opportunity for doing it. I must really talk to somebody about it. Mr. Kimble, of course, is very kind; but then he is a man and he looks at things as busy men always do. I have never spoken to you, Ruth, about my family matters, but I expect you have heard something about them. However, I will begin from the beginning. You know what a good man my husband was—oh, I can't think how it has happened, for he never spent a penny upon himself! The lawyers

say that there is four hundred and seventy three pounds owing from him, and he only left one hundred and thirty pounds to pay it with. My dear husband would never keep any of the money which he got from the living, else he might have been a rich man. When he was a young man, he made a promise with himself that all the money which he earned in God's service should be laid out again for the good of his people, only keeping enough just to support himself and his family. He always said that the money was not his, but was entrusted to him for those who should want it. He acted upon this principle all his life through, and this is how it is we are so poor.'

A short silence followed this opening.

'But did Mr. Bewglass owe so much money?' said Ruth at last, with difficulty finding any remark to make.

'No, he did not owe it himself, but it seems to be a rule when a clergyman dies for all the property which belongs to his

living to be examined and a report made of the cost of any repairs to it which seem necessary. This is how Mr. Kimble explains it to me. Then the amount has to be paid out of the money left by the clergyman who has died. If there is not enough, they may sell everything he left behind him.'

Ruth began now seriously to grasp the situation, and looked in consternation accordingly. Mrs. Bewglass proceeded with the narrative as well as she could.

'It seems that there is such a large sum to be paid for our property, because there are so many old farm buildings upon it, which are not in good repair. But the tenants never complained of them. My husband always did for them what they thought necessary. But I must be stronger, Ruth. Really I am as bad as a child, and set a shameful example to you. We must be prepared for trouble in this world, and must bear it uncomplainingly when it

comes. I am not distressed on my own account, for an old woman like me can hide her head anywhere ; but for Gabriel !' —Mrs. Bewglass looked at her companion in a most distressing manner.—'He loves this little home so much. He always says that it makes him a new man to come for a single day to it——' the old lady's tears fell upon her knitting ;—'and—and if they should break it up, Ruth, I don't know what I shall do.'

'Break up this home!' exclaimed Ruth, looking aghast at the mere thought. 'But they may not sell this furniture? They can only take your money.'

'Everything, dear child. They may sell the chairs we are sitting on, and the beds in which we sleep. Mr. Kimble will not tell me this; but I know it myself.'

'But—but, can it not be saved? Can not money——?'

'We will not borrow money to save ourselves a little trouble,' replied the old

lady more firmly. ‘That would be no relief to us at all. My chief concern, Ruth, is how to keep all this from Gabriel. I am determined that he shall not know of it until after all is settled.’

‘But it is not certain that they will sell everything?’

‘I consider that it is. It is useless to live upon a false hope.’

‘Would it not be better to let Mr. Bewglass know, in case he can find out any means of remed——?’

‘No, Ruth. It might lead him to some rash step, and would in any case disturb him dreadfully. He must not know anything about it, until all is settled one way or the other. I have insisted upon this to Mr. Kimble, until he is quite angry about it, but I know my own son best, and I know that it is the right thing to do.’

‘Of course, he knows about the money being claimed,’ continued the lady, after a few minutes’ silence; ‘but he does not know

to what it may lead.' (So Mrs. Bewglass thought.) 'He has not the money with which to pay it, else I should act differently. It is enough that I should rob him of half his earnings, which I do, Ruth.'

Mrs. Bewglass made this confession with some bitterness, and Miss Sulby looked across at her with surprise.

'He keeps my home entirely, as well as himself; and, whatever he says, I am sure that he pinches himself to do it. It costs more to live comfortably in the town than in the country; don't you think so, Ruth?'

'Yes, it certainly does.'

Ruth was listening to her friend's confession with the deepest interest; it seemed especially so at this new turn in the conversation.

'I need not tell you of the quarrel we had about it, for it was really almost a quarrel; but the self-willed boy got his way. He pretended that this house was as much his as mine, when he only comes

to it for a fortnight in the whole year. He would not hear of my going to live with him in London, although I am sure we could live more cheaply together. And I could look after him so much better than he can himself. I know that he does not live well enough; and oh, Ruth! to see his linen. It is quite black when it comes from the wash. I am ashamed to think of him in it; and yet he has to pay exorbitant prices. Fancy fourpence for a white shirt, when it comes back as black as a duster and without an atom of starch in it. I advised him to take to wearing flannel; but he could never bear it.'

That was a dangerous topic for Mrs. Bewglass to touch upon, for she could seldom restrain her feelings about it. For the moment she even forgot the graver subject of her trouble, in the trials to which her poor son was put in his lodgings. She had gathered them all for herself from the most casual utterances of Gabriel. When-

ever she directly spoke to him about them, he passed her off with a laugh. He never referred to them himself.

Ruth was naturally able to extend to her much womanly sympathy. She would have readily got up Gabriel's shirts herself, or put on buttons, or darned his socks, if only out of her friendship for his mother. Unfortunately she was denied the opportunity of showing her willingness to be of assistance. She did not even make any statement about it to the old lady. Her remarks were confined to the laundry in the abstract. But Mrs. Bewglass suddenly returned.

‘But I shall have to go and live with him now,’ she said, in an altered tone of voice. ‘There will be nothing else for me to do.’

‘When do you think this will happen, Mrs. Bewglass?’

‘I don't know, my dear; but I believe it may do so any day. I am prepared for it any day.’

‘But you would get some notice of it?’

‘I don’t know. I am afraid the lawyers are not in the habit of showing much consideration for private feelings.’

‘I suppose not,’ replied Ruth, absently, pricking her finger with the needle at the same time.

‘But now I have told you, Ruth, I am better. You must not be wretched about it. I believe you are fond of me, and I did not want the unpleasant news to come upon you unawares. Let us talk of something else. Read something to me now.’

‘Please excuse me to-night, Mrs. Bewglass. It would only be pretence, for I am sure that neither of us could attend to anything I read. It will be better to talk.’

The old lady readily acquiesced, and they gradually got into a deep conversation concerning the distribution of various winter garments, and the wants and troubles of their neighbours.

Ruth took her part readily in the dis-

cussion, and showed quite a remarkable intimacy with the tactics of charitable enterprise, as well as a minute knowledge of the condition of the poorer villagers around her. Nevertheless, it would have been apparent to a shrewd observer that Mrs. Bewglass spoke with less encumbered spirits.

Miss Sulby was only young, and had consequently less command over her feelings. The information which she had received to-night had been to her no ordinary blow. She could hardly have felt it more had similar news been brought her of the position of her own mother. The cloud brooded constantly over her, even when her mind was engaged in other directions.

She never stayed late with Mrs. Bewglass, but to-night she left earlier than usual. She pleaded work to be prepared for the morrow, and her friend made no efforts to detain her. The old lady felt towards her in the position of a mother, and found no difficulty in bestowing upon

the young woman all her wealth of affection, whilst at the same time she perhaps accorded her more individual consideration than might have been the case between parent and child. Ruth's wrappages were carefully examined and at once pronounced insufficient. It was dangerous to go out of a warm room on such a night without very elaborate preparations. In a moment another shawl had been produced and adjusted with Mrs. Bewglass's own hands.

'There, dear,' she said, when it was accomplished, and the greater part of Ruth's face smothered in the folds. 'Be quick and run home, and keep the shawl over your mouth. Do not worry over what I have told you. Good-night, God bless you. I shall see you to dinner on Saturday. Good-bye.'

Ruth was forthwith bundled out of the door, her old friend holding her own shawl to her mouth whilst she stood by

the opening. She did not shut out that cold blast until her visitor was safely beyond the gate into the road: when the sound of it closing had been audible, Mrs. Bewglass turned the key in the door and walked slowly again to her sitting-room.

The school-mistress obeyed every injunction, and may be supposed to be none the worse for her journey. Fortunately there were a few gleeds still alive in her fireplace, so that with the aid of the bellows she quickly had the grate all a-glow. Her dog Dash showed his joy at her return in his accustomed boisterous fashion. As Ruth knelt upon the rug with the bellows, he leaped up to her shoulder with screams, and pressed his cold nose against her cheek. He would not desist from his exertions, notwithstanding innumerable rebuffs, until his mistress was seated in her arm-chair and he curled up in her lap.

No work was possible for Ruth that night, strong self-disciplinarian as she at

all times was. Her imagination was beyond her control upon this particular occasion, and she must follow wherever it led her.

She reviewed Mrs. Bewglass's disclosures with the utmost bitterness of spirit, but was unable to come to any satisfactory conclusions. One thing pressed itself forcibly upon her, and that was the mother's error in withholding the information from her son. Ruth was acquainted with Mr. Gabriel Bewglass, and she had formed her own opinion of his qualities. It appeared to her in the highest degree probable that merely at the approach of his stalwart figure these ugly difficulties would take to flight. But, after all, he had no money. His mother must at least be well informed as to that; and without money it did seem difficult to do much. This thought took Miss Sulby from her chair, and she walked across to the table in the corner. A closed writing-desk was upon it, which she opened with a small key from her pocket, and

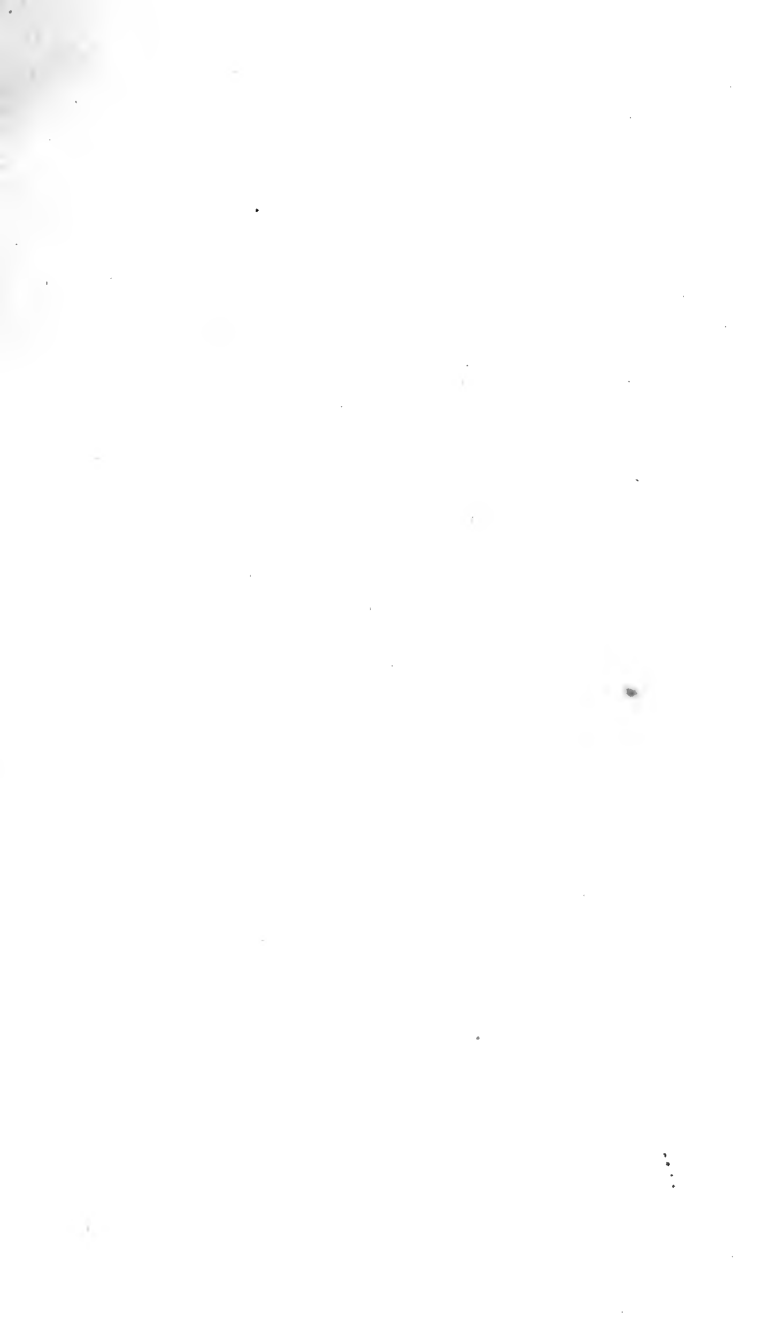
therefrom she produced what seemed a thin memorandum book. With it she returned again to the fire. For a minute or two she was calculating figures, and at last pronounced the result aloud.

‘Eighty-four pounds, seven shillings, and nine pence.’

Her thoughts again proceeded in silence. She sat there late into the night, and found but little rest when she retired. Some kind of scheme, however, she had formed during her watching, which had apparently brought her a modicum of comfort. Even the morning light seemed to approve it.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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